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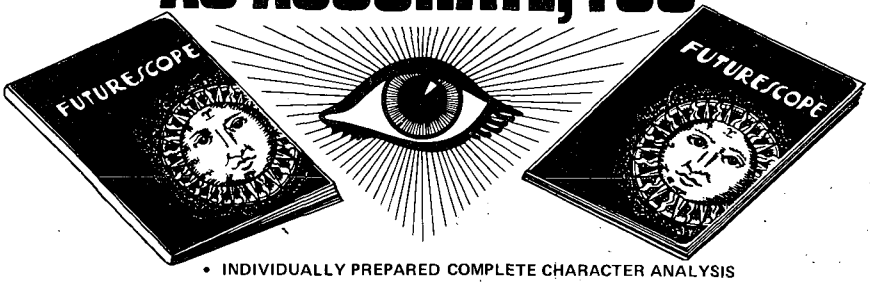

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FANTASTIC Vol. 23, No. 1, November 1973, is published by-monthly by ULTIMATE PUBLISHING CO., INC., 69-62 230 Street, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. Editorial office: Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364 60¢ a copy. Subscription rates: One year (6 issues) United States and possessions: $3.00; Canada and Pan American union countries: $3.50, all other countries, $4.00. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions, and other mail items are to be sent to Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364, Second Class Postage paid at Flushing, N.Y., and at additional mailing office. *Copyright 1973 by Ultimate publishing Co., Inc. All rights reserved. Editorial contributions must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care; however, publisher assumes no responsibility for return or safety of art work, photographs or manuscripts.*

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TED WHITE

editorial

COINCIDENCES: 1. For nearly as many years as I have been reading science fiction, I have also been a fan of mystery novels—especially those written by Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett and their accolytes. Although the genre has been at a low ebb in recent times—only Ross Macdonald still carries the banner—I spent many years combing used book stores and building a library of mystery novels which easily rivals my library of science fiction.

2. Harlan Ellison shares my interest in mystery and suspense novels, and, while we were living on the same block of Manhattan's Christopher Street in 1961, he successfully touted to me both the James Bond thrillers (not yet a popular success at that point) and Donald Hamilton's superior Matt Helm spy-mysteries. (I was able to return the favor, a few years later, by suggesting to him the books of Donald Westlake and Larry Bloch; I'd discovered the former on the recommendation of Dave Van Arnam.) Some time later, in the latter half of the sixties when the cold war had spawned racks of James Bond imitators, Harlan told me to pick up on a new paperback series from Signet Books by David St. John—the Peter Ward CIA books.

3. When convicted Watergate burglar E. Howard Hunt's name began appearing with some regularity in news stories, he was variously identified as "a former CIA man who wrote spy novels," and "the author of more than forty mystery novels." My curiosity was immediately whetted—was there any way this man could have written as many as forty novels without my having read at least one of them? Yet I had never encountered Hunt's byline on any book. Obviously he was using one or more pseudonyms—but what were they?

At this point a rumor was passed on to me that Hunt had also written science fiction under a particular name which I won't mention here (for reasons which will be obvious in a moment), for Ace Books. My curiosity increased. I saw the glimmerings of an editorial—a unique slant on the Watergate scandal—and I poised myself over a stack of the sf books purportedly written by Hunt, with the intention of reading them for themes which might point in either a moral or physical sense toward the Watergate affair. However, caution led me to attempt to verify the rumor that these books were indeed authored by Hunt. I phoned Don Wollheim in New York. Don was, for nearly twenty years, the editor of Ace Books' sf line, and is presently the publisher of DAW Books. Don chuckled

(Continued on page 125)

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JUNCTION

Jack Dann is a young man who foreswore a career in law for a much chancier career in writing. "I started writing sf," he says, "because sf has always formed a substantial portion of what I read. It provides, for me, the most colorful palette and the largest canvas of possibilities to paint upon. It pulls out all the stops, lets me play with surrealism or extrapolate stories out of the latest scientific discoveries . . ." In "Junction," Dann has indeed pulled out all the stops. Here, in a surreal universe, time is looped, and Cause has been sundered from Effect. Here Ned Wheeler lives and dreams, and as he dreams, so dream we all . . .

JACK DANN

Illustrated by MICHAEL NALLY

JUNCTION: white picket fences, one small perfectly rectangular park, rows of little houses with no glass windows, yards meticulously tended, distances marvelously the same, as if plotted for the blind.

Children heel beside mothers who never wear hats and sport ugly dresses dyed in pretty colors, prayer meetings are held in the reconverted and blessed Desert Midland Bank (where the boys and men and especially Ned Wheeler can sit on the third level and look down through the broken glass and watch the whores getting laid in the Congress Bar).

As Ned had been told—"Glass to let in the many eyes of God. A transparent mountain of perfection," with its broken windows and pilasters and naves for the bankers' ghosts. But who needs money now? Everything's the same, only different.

And five barns in "Center City" of the village, a racial memory of a medieval status symbol. And lands held in fief and in fee and in common and in escrow as the fathers saw best to govern the town-island that promised the last hope in the civilised world for God and man.

And it was the last hope.

NED WHEELER STOOD in the high

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grass and watched the mountain form in the distance. It pushed itself out of the ground silently. Snow capped peaks reached into a slate sky colored with blue streamers of cirrus. He waited for the mountain to dissolve, merge with the robin egg clouds, or explode into a shower of hypercubes to provide fourth dimensional moisture. Anything could happen.

Before him, grey tundra extended from the grassy plain to provide a dividing line between two realities. And beyond the tundra, a mountain grew, belching amorphous rock, forming new mountain chains, silently proclaiming a new geologic era.

Behind him, Junction, unchanging, still the same, prim, pretty, only today a bit noisier than other days. Junction was a democracy. So elections were being held and ale being drunk and the whores were working overtime. President's Day was a time for hymns and anthems and good pot, a time to jump and scream and not be jailed or whipped or clamped in stocks or thrown into the urine pit.

But today Junction was too noisy for Ned, and everyone would be using his favorite whores. If he stopped at the Congress Bar, which smelled of perspiration and soil, they would probably put him to work. So here he was, hand in his pocket, awed by nature freaking out before him, thinking about Hilda's heavy hips and Sandra's heavy breasts.

He was frightened of the growing black mountains; they were great bears lumbering toward him, mouths slavering, needle teeth glinting under a black sun. (Ned had never seen a bear, had only read about them in a golden book in the library.)

Before him was Hell. As Ned has been told—"And to punish sinners, God sundered cause from effect." And Ned believed it; he was watching it. Out there, nothing was predictable. Water could crack, the sun was black or green or sometimes (after he had smoked some very good pot) it was a golden insect sucking up the world, peeing green lettuce, saturating the world in vegetable rain.

But Ned still liked to stand on the edge of reason, on the perimeter of God's hope, and try to outguess Hell. At least it wasn't boring—the only things in Junction that weren't boring to Ned were the accouterments of Hell: whores, ale, and pot.

The mountain couldn't keep growing, Ned thought. So it did. It grew and grew and the sun turned green and it was Halloween and the grass swayed in the wind and the birds crowed above him.

And something moved just beyond the tundra. Ned felt a chill. A rabbit running, he thought, and dreamed of stew and the golden book. He could barely make out the creature running toward the tundra. Running faster, just reaching the tundra, but never crossing over.

Ned was relieved. A creature from Hell could not reach Heaven. That was a reassuring thought. But

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it was still running, never quite reaching the greyness of sand and rock and plain. It would shriek and crawl and beg, but the distance was too great.

Bolstered by higher knowledge and faith, Ned was no longer frightened. He studied the monster and tried to make out its features. Was it a woman? Did it have pointed teeth? How many arms and legs?

Enjoying his vision and thoughts, he pulled a milky white weed from its sheath and slid it into his mouth, between his upper gum and cheek. The raw brown juice burned his throat. Perhaps the creature was a bird of Heaven trapped in Hell. He thought about that, trying to recall a phrase from the book. Ezekiel the Wishwasher saw in a vision beasts with wings that were called angels. That was in the book. "And they were full of eyes round about them." He didn't quite know what that meant. If the monster trying to escape into Heaven was only a bit larger—he still could not make it out.

He thought of St. John the Diviner and remembered his father, who could memorize anything, recite: "And before the throne *there was* . . ."—he would raise his hands above his head at this point—". . . a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round the throne, *were* . . ."—he threw up his hands again—". . . four beasts full of eyes before and behind."

"And the four beasts had each of them six wings about *Him*." Father breathing with difficulty, looking to the ceiling. "And they were full of eyes within, and they rest not day or night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come."

Full of reverence, if not for the vision, at least for being able to remember it; he strained his eyes to see the creature. It could be a lion, but a lion couldn't run upright. But neither could the rest.

Eyes straining. Ned could see it now. The creature was crawling, its wings were flapping. It jumped into the air and rolled into the tundra.

The mountain turned to glass, reflected the black rays of the sun.

Ned screamed.

The angel from Heaven was after him, the sinner. It had escaped from Hell, coming to claim him. Could this only be a vision, a vision of conversion?

The monster lumbered across the tundra.

But which monster did he see? Was it only a figure of his imagination? He could see it better now; it became larger as it bridged the distance. It investigated the new ground. Ned could see that it was neither an animal nor a human being. And it was too big to be just his imagination, he thought.

But it had come from Hell and Ned wasn't going to wait. He ran through the high grass to Junction Road, looking back only once.

And found nothing but grass and a sunny day behind him. The creature had disappeared or,

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perhaps, had never been there in the first place. Ned, gaining courage, walked back several paces to investigate, then several more. Before him, the mountain of glass had turned to gelatin and was shaking and melting.

Although Ned Wheeler was awed by the religious moment, he still wanted some good pot, a touch of spider brandy, and a good fat whore. It would be a long walk through the grass, woods and wastes, commons, meadows, and lammas lands.

II.

JUNCTION CONSISTED OF two great streets running parallel with each other between the hillside and the river—which some said was fed from Hell. It was around and about Main Street that the church and the whore house bars could be found. Riverside Drive, a hated but still used name, was a market and residential street. In the middle of Main Street there survived, against town law, a large farm house with all its agricultural and pastoral appurtenances: horses and oxen in the stalls, and a dung-heap of gigantic size in the front yard.

That house, known conveniently as "The Stone House," was the President's residence. The oxen and horses were displayed as a symbol of feudal power. And since a president could only serve—or be served—for one year, Thomas McCall, the incumbent, was moving out. He would return to his old trade as a mason.

"The Stone House" was a curiosity; most of the houses in Junction were made of timber, and a fire became a village holiday for the children.

Ned Wheeler found Main Street crowded with election day celebrants. Dressed in Sunday best, courteous to one another, singing, laughing, giggling, they all walked to church or a bar or a lover or favorite whore. Men lifted their caps to the ladies who had not bathed in weeks. All wore the neatly powdered look of celebration and humility. These victorian faces possessed certitude and thin lipped righteousness.

"Hello, Ned Wheeler," said Miss Jenkens, a squat old woman wearing a faded black dress and a veil. She was an old school teacher of Ned's. "Are you off to church?"

"Yes, ma'am," he said, walking a bit faster.

A man without a shirt, chest covered with ashes, winked at him as he passed. Ned bowed his head at a group of ladies prancing by. They giggled and pointed at him, their pungent smells preceding them. The youngest one, a saucy blond, scratched at her crotch and Ned looked away, wishing for a swim and a smoke. But he would go to church and pray for true conversion—at least for a little while.

The church was two blocks away. There were not very many vendor stalls in this area. He passed "The Hanging Tree," a small

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whorehouse that was doing a good trade today. But the girls were not up to par, Ned thought. They were jealous of the Congress girls and were always starting fights. Ned remembered a skinny redhead who painted her toothless gums and had given Sandra the long pink scar that ran across her face. But that had been years ago, when he frequented every house in town.

Ned sighted a piece of glass in the gutter and stooped to pick it up. That would bring good luck—glass had taken on religious significance. Most of the church glass that had once littered the immediate vicinity of the bank had been picked up. Although some had been donated to the tabernacle, most was kept for luck and private prayer.

Much of Ned's whoring money had been made by selling these sharp trinkets. But no more, he thought. He slipped the silver into his handkerchief and put it into his pocket, sure that it belonged to the bank and was holy.

Miss Jenkens caught up with Ned and, puffing, said, "Your father's worried about you. Do you know that? Do you know that he's in church right now?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"He's a good religious man. And he's worried about you, worried you're going to walk right into Hell. 'The sinner will be bibbed into Hell.' "

Ned looked around the street; there was no escape. He did not see a familiar face. Already, he regretted his vision and possible new conversion.

"I saw you pick up a piece of holy glass. Don't you know that's a sin. You're not allowed to touch it. Your fingers will burn in Hell. And it's against the law, only a clergyman is pure enough to touch it. What if I told on you? What then? Are you going to give it to one of your whores?"

"No, ma'am."

"Aren't you worried just a little bit about being poisoned in Hell with your whoring and smoking and drinking?"

"Yes, ma'am, I am," Ned said. And he meant it, although he dreamed about Sandra and some good pot. But that would just be another sin.

"Ned Wheeler, if you're really going to church, I won't tell."

"Thank you, ma'am," he said, listening to the laughter from the Congress Bar. He thought he could hear Hilda's husky voice; she loved to laugh and bite when she tumbled.

"Then I'll walk along with you." She handed him her bible and took his arm.

"Your sin will be on me," she said, "but I think I can better stand it than you. Now that you have it, perhaps God will see to look into your soul."

There were a few horses and wagons in the street. Ned kept to the carriage side of the road so as not to be splashed by garbage. A bag fell from a third story window-hole and exploded beside Miss Jenkens; its putrescent smells were immediately picked up by a warm

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breeze and wafted down the street.

Ned climbed the stone church steps slowly, his schoolteacher hanging upon his arm. He tried not to look at the Congress Bar on his left. The side door had become the official entrance to the church; only the children used the front entrance.

Some of his friends stood outside the Congress Bar and called to him.

"Hey, Ned; you're missing a hellova party."

"Hilda's been asking about you. She misses you."

"Going to church with Miss Jenkens. Ned's got religion. And he's using the side door, too."

Ned felt his face flush.

A catcall from the second story, a strident voice screeching, "Ned, honey. Going to church? We're having an election party."

Once inside the building, his heels clicking on the faded red and blue parquetry, he could hear the congregation singing, his father's voice the loudest of all. He followed Miss Jenkens to her seat in the first pew on the main floor. He could smell the mold of the pulpit carpet in front of him. A heavy man with thinning hair combed up into a pompadour was leading the services. The notes of "My Country Tis of Thee" echoed in the open vaults where Ned used to play hide and seek and had once banged the carpenter's daughter. (At the time the carpenter had been president, and his daughter was, indeed, a prestigious prize.)

Miss Jenkens sat down and patted the seat beside her, motioning Ned to stay with her. But the smells and her devotion were too much for him, and he excused himself by telling her that he had to look for his father.

"You're probably going to sneak out the front and run across the street. Your friends are probably still calling you."

"No, mam," he said as he watched her breasts rise and fall as she breathed. At one time, it was rumored, she had been a beautiful woman with a full face and long black hair. She had had a few lovers, one of them his grandfather, or so he had overheard his father say. Looking at her veined, wrinkled hands, he imagined her old shriveled breasts and wondered what she had been like.

"Well, all right. Go look for him, if you must," she said, rubbing her eye. "At least you're respectful. Could I borrow your handkerchief for a minute. I've left mine at home, and I think I've got something in my eye." She took off her hat and veil. Her hair was dyed red and she was slightly bald in the back. A bug crawled to the surface and then disappeared again into her red forest which had been patiently stiffened and combed.

"Well?" she asked.

Ned laughed a bit too loudly and he felt everyone watching him as he walked toward the stairwell. Then up three flights of stairs, past the sitting room—which was the drinking room—and down the hallway onto the balcony. The bal-

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cony was accidental: the third floor had given way years ago, and the masons had simply smoothed the ragged edges into an oval and the carpenters strengthened what was left.

Ned's father was standing up and praying, left hand holding the book, right index finger pointing out the lines to whomever might be interested. He was very proud of his reading proficiency. Behind him was a large window that overlooked the street and the Congress Bar.

Squeezing between his father and Mr. Brownlaw, a city official and fervent church-goer, Ned sat down. His father, without even looking at him, handed him a book, and Ned held it open and waited for his father to sit down.

A half hour later, after all the young men were happily seated, he sat down. "Why did you bother to even come? It's almost over."

Ned knew that there would be at least four hours left, five, probably, for his father. "I had a vision of Hell. That's why I came."

His father was suddenly interested. He brushed back his grey hair and picked at a mole on his forehead. Where the father was ruggedly handsome—features sharply defined and body well kept—the son was overweight and his face was soft and familiarly average. Of course, he resented his father for that, but the whores liked Ned. And he was three inches taller than his father.

"I told you to stay away from the tundraland. You shouldn't even go near there. Tell me about your vision."

Ned told him what had happened, and his father nodded and smiled as if he had experienced that vision many times before.

"Haniel, Kafziel, Azriel, and Aniel. You saw one of the monsters from Heaven. A wonderful sight. And you found nothing when you went back. Well, visions are only to see once. I knew this would happen one day. Sit and pray. I'm very proud and very happy." He turned the pages of Ned's bible to the correct prayer and began intoning the words.

Ned stared at the true book and remembered Miss Jenkens who had taught him to read it. She had a habit of raising her eyes to Heaven whenever she said an important word. Once, on a dare, he had looked up her dress as she embraced the sky and said, "Amen." She used to scold him when he went to the Old Library, now a stowbin, to read the other old books. She had told him about "trash" and why the old books didn't count or work any more. "That was before God punished us and raised Hell to Earth," she had said.

Ned's bible had seen too much wear, but, then, it had not been made to stand up to normal use. The binding was torn, and the script was smudging. Upon closer inspection, Ned could see that it had been transcribed in haste. Sam Sence, the town scribe, was only paid a few pennies for each book he

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produced. So quality was compromised by quantity. The new bibles were not as thick as the old versions. Through the years each succeeding bible became slightly thinner as proclaimed authoritative councils decided what would be the true and correct portions of the New English Bible.

Mouthing the words, Ned tried to find meaning in the many cyphers. He sang and smiled at the congregation. He glanced at his father, who had turned his head to sneak a peek out of the window behind him. The second story window hole of the Congress Bar was just visible. On the pulpit below them, the mockministers had donned white garments and pointed conical caps. With arms outstretched and fingers parted to form the sacred sign, they blessed the congregation and prayed to hold back the advance of Hell.

The congregation closed their eyes so as not to witness the holy sign, and beat their chests. Ned's father clapped his chest the loudest and cried as he sang. Ned tried to imitate him.

It became warm and stuffy; Ned could smell the pungent odors of old men. And the services went on. Ned's father was so happy that he wouldn't sit down. Whenever Ned would sit, his father would knit up his eyebrows. And Ned would sigh and stand. As the hours passed, the glass behind him seemed to draw his face. And every turn of his head that brought him closer to God's glass, ironically, brought him closer to Hell.

Sandra was hanging out the window-hole of the Congress Bar. Ned turned around and saw her, but could not hear her shouts. At his father's glance, he turned toward the pulpit and said a prayer, already feeling the old discontent of being forced into God's lap. The chair, although more comfortable than the pews downstairs, was beginning to hurt his buttocks.

Word had passed that Forester, the featherwaker, was coming upstairs to see if anyone had fallen asleep. With his approach everyone nudged his neighbor and sang louder. Forester's bald head was polished with perspiration; he had acquired the nickname "Chromedome."

But what was chrome? A strange way to say "Shiny," Ned thought. "Another mystery of life," his father had said.

The glass pulled Ned around just in time to see Sandra unbutton her blouse and dangle her tits at someone below. She glanced at Ned and winked. Although she wasn't his best lay, she was his favorite girl. She sucked her fingers and Ned sat down again, covering his lap with the book. His father raised an eyebrow, but it did no good: Ned would not stand. His face flushed as his father prayed.

Another hour passed. It was getting dark. Ned wondered if the mountain was still growing out of Hell. There, it would probably be sunny as noon. Remembrance of his vision brought prayers to his

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mouth.

Another hour. Behind him it seemed that the entire town was trying to squeeze into the Congress Bar. That was where a closed meeting was being held in the wine-cellar—the traditional room for caucuses and political brawls—to decide who would be the next president. Of course, the president had no power—that was reserved for the king. But no one knew who the king was. It was rumored that the king was a myth and the president really did hold power, but every president denied that.

Ned had to go to the bathroom, but it was considered unholy to leave the church on a prayerday. He could see Sandra still hanging out the window-hole looking for customers. She had put a sweater on to counter the night-chill, but expediency forced her to expose her breasts. Looking at her only strengthened the feeling of fullness Ned was trying to hold back.

Without asking permission, he stood up and left his father. He would return, he thought. After all, did his father expect him to become a complete convert in a day?

Ned relieved himself in the street outside. There was a cool breeze, and the street smelled of good sweat and food and urine. Behind him the great windows of the church were yellow with flickering light from the candles. A candle for each sin, the flame of penance. His father had probably already lit one for him, he thought.

He forced himself to walk back up the stone church steps. His father had not, would not, ever learn. As long as he could stand and pray, he would badger Ned with religion. Ned could never be religious enough to satisfy his father.

Make him happy, Ned thought, inhaling deeply, pretending he was smoking some good pot and lying with Sandra and Hilda. Stay with him tonight, he told himself. The vision was true—you're converted.

"Hey, Ned," shouted John Sewall, one of the town smithies. He was standing on the porch of the Congress Bar. "Come on. Party, party, party. They're thinking up the next president in the cellar. Aren't you interested in eavesdropping?"

"No thanks," Ned said, but he stopped on the stairs and waited to be persuaded.

"Everybody else is using up Hilda. Must be thirty guys jumped on her belly today. Give her a dose for you. And you're up there praying with your highfalutin father."

"Shut it."

"Come on," shouted Baldanger, the shoemaker, from a second story window-hole above the porch. "We see you. Everything's just about started, and who are we going to tumble the whores with? Old Herman trying to bounce long enough to come?" Baldanger whistled past a chipped tooth as he spoke.

"Come on, Ned."

Behind Ned, a glass cathedral reaching for Heaven, shimmering

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yellow to relieve him of sin, its money vaults now collecting alms and prayers for the poor.

And before him, the devices of Hell.

NED LEANED OUT the second story window-hole and watched the revenants promenading along the green in front of the church. A central bonfire provided light and warmth for the cool night. The figures looked grotesque in the flickering firelight. Ned tried not to look at the church, for he would see his father praying for him, the "almost convert."

Would it take a bash on the head, Ned asked himself, to make me believe?

"Is this for me?" asked Hilda.

Ned turned around. Hilda had searched his pockets and found the shard of holy glass in his handkerchief. She held it before a candle and examined it.

"I always know when you have glass by the way you fold your handkerchief. This is a pretty piece. It looks green at the edges. How come you always find the glass? It seems to grow out of the dirt wherever you walk. Baldanger never finds any."

"Give me that," Ned said.

She ducked out of reach, layers of fat jiggling as she moved, thick auburn hair hiding her freckled face. "Come on, honey. For all the free tumbles and drinks and pot when you said you didn't have a dollar." She lay down on the floor, legs spread and raised in the air. "Come on, a new position for the glass. You owe me a present."

"Hell I do," he shouted, and jumped on her, straddling her wide stomach. She laughed and kept her arm out of his reach.

Laughter from the door. Sandra and Baldanger, arm in arm, were hooting and shouting at the wrestlers.

"And look," said Sandra, "Ned with a hard-on. Very impolite."

Baldanger looked in around the room. He was wearing one of the girls' robes. He was a lanky man with a deep tan and thinning blond hair which he combed over his forehead. Sandra, by contrast, had black hair cropped short at the ears and pale, almost translucent skin. The delicate network of veins was clearly visible on her throat and breasts. She was wearing an open front robe that exposed her breasts.

"Stop it," Sandra said. "We've got some news. Give Ned whatever he wants and listen."

Hilda gave him the piece of glass and curled up in the bed to sulk.

"Have you seen my clothes?" asked Baldanger.

"Shut-up," Sandra said. "Do you know who's in the cellar? Well, from what I hear, there's almost no South Side representation. It's all Central." Sandra peeled back a broken fingernail, pausing for effect. "Old Herman is down there, and Stan and Freeglass and practically everybody but you and Baldy. You've got most of us to yourselves."

Baldanger stuffed some green pot

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into his pipe and passed it around.

"What about East Side?" asked Ned. "*They* must have people down there."

"Yes, they do," said Baldanger, curling his lip over his chipped tooth to stop the whistle—it didn't work. "But not as much as last year. When the mayor picked out the electors, he probably figured it was only fair that we get more representation after what happened last year."

"East Side, West Side, they don't even exist," Hilda said, twisting her hair into knots. "What do you need political parties for? They're as imaginary as the cow pasture they represent. What are they but an excuse to get drunk and slide between our legs?"

Everyone ignored her. It was bad taste to discuss the parties seriously.

"It's a fraud," she continued. "What do we need a president for, anyway? He has no power, doesn't do anything, lives off the public tit like a Goddamm lord for a year, and he's elected by a bunch of drunks. Everyone respectable is over there in church." She pointed toward the window.

"That's not true," said Baldanger. "Hell, the Reverend's down there. The altarmen are covering for him at the church."

Ned ran his thumb over the surface of the glass. "Nobody knows if the president's got any power because they never tell," Ned said. "Even Sam, after he finished his term, would only smile when anyone asked him about it." He made a fist around the holyglass. "And look at all the old presidents; they've all been smart, even if none of them had any education. As drunk as the electors get, they always elect someone smart. And how come there's always some clergy down there? Did you ever think of that?"

Hilda giggled. "Ned's going over to the other side."

"He was in church most of the day," Sandra said, "turning around—just like his father—to look at my tits."

"Shut up," Ned said. "The presidents have all had something to do with religion. Even old Sam was going to church three times a week when he was in office."

"That's because he had to," Baldanger said.

"That's right," said Ned. "The president represents tradition and religion. Remember, the presidents used to rule over everything. So what does that mean since God changed everything and put Hell all around us? It means that the president, at least symbolically, rules Hell and Earth. And Junction, whether we like it or not, is Earth."

"What's symbolically mean?" asked Sandra.

Baldanger filled the pipe again and gave it to Hilda, who was still pouty. The candles in the room were low, and everything looked soft and yellow. Ned could hear the chatter of the congregants as they left the church for home and clean living. The girls would soon be

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working overtime.

Ned passed the pipe to Sandra and watched the smoke curl in the yellow light. A breeze wafted into the room through the window-hole, circulating the bad air and banishing the smoke. Baldanger lay down on the bed with Hilda and Sandra. Sandra protested that she'd have to go downstairs soon, but she leaned against the wall, her leg draped over Baldanger's crotch, and seemed to enjoy the company.

Sitting alone in front of the window-hole, Ned watched the congregants below. Were they waiting around for the electors to decide? he asked himself. But that would take all night. And what did he care? He did not want to face his father tonight. He would stay here until morning.

"You know," Baldanger said, "Ferris Angleton was downstairs, higher than a sonofabitch, and telling stories. He said he saw a monster that looked like a bird running across the northwest pasture. Christ, he even brought in his daughter, Flora—the one with the game leg—to say she saw it, too."

"I heard something like that," Sandra said, "only from Alex Eitrides."

Ned was developing a sense of fate. He looked at the church and thought about the monster that was stalking him—somehow, he was sure that it was looking for him. He dreamed of the church and the smells of the pulpit and traced his father's face in the street outlines. Shadow and line, a sparkle of glass, the holy building before him. To remind him.

He listened to the springs squeaking under the weight of Baldanger and Sandra, concentrated on the candles in the church. One by one they were slowly going out, substituting greyness for each yellow halo.

III.

NED AWAKENED with a start. He was with Hilda in her bed, arm propped up against the wall, leg resting on the coarse hide rug. The thin, worn blanket lay in a pile on the floor. In her hand, unbeknown to him, Hilda clutched the shard of holy glass.

The room was filled with people who were shouting and laughing. The electors had not slept and were still drunk. They had been followed by the girls, townsfolk, and clergy. The strong morning sunlight streaming through the window-hole revealed the starkness and shabbyness of the room and the blanched faces that only rest could restore to life.

A tattooed whore pinched Ned's buttocks and shouted, "Out the door, out the door."

"And don't forget his whore," a red-faced farmer shouted.

"Ned Wheeler, King of the whores."

"The sleeper's a President."

"Life to the President."

"Here, here."

Hilda was picked up and passed out the door by strong hands that

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playfully squeezed her soft parts. After a few seconds, her screams turned to yelps and giggles.

Most of the people in the crowd were Ned's friends. He could see Baldanger, Herman and Stan, Sam Sence, Ferris Angleton, Alex Eitrides' little girl, Reverend Surface, and, of course, all the girls. But there were unfriendly faces in the crowd.

Fairchild Sewell, a slightly built man wearing a discarded guildsman cap, knuckled Ned in the neck and called him a sonofabitch. Sewell had been a Central City party prompter before he defected to the North Side to become a professional elector. His brother Cravett, who outweighed Fairchild by seventy-five pounds, had a more difficult time staying abreast and was kneed in the crotch by Sam Sence. Most of the members from the other parties were waiting outside on the green.

The crowd carried Ned and Hilda downstairs, past the bar, out the front door and into the small village green. Everyone on the green was shouting and waving at Ned. The crowds spilled onto Main Street which formed a circle around the perfectly rectangular park. The church looked on blankly with its broken glass eyes. Further down the street—which was roughly paved with cobblestones, but fouled with mire and the accumulation of garbage thrown from the adjacent houses—the shops were closed, although a few vendors were talking business, oblivious to the festivities occuring up the street.

A high-pitched voice shouted, "Speech, speech, give us an inauguration speech."

"Yes, a speech from the newly elected President."

They all began to chant, "Speech, speech, speech." Mugs and ale had been taken from the tavern, for the Central City Party people were drinking and waving their flagons.

The electors, backed up by the crowd, pushed Ned and Hilda up a crude stairway onto the stocks platform in the middle of the park, where a hangman's tree and an assortment of wooden stocks and whipping posts served as warnings to any would-be offender. From the platform Ned could look over the heads of the crowd and see Main Street winding its way downtown. Houses and shops were scattered along the route, clumped together to form subsections of the central village, their tidy roofs sloping toward the road and crowned with chimney pots in which birds built their nests. Before Ned, the glass cathedral, the tallest building in Junction. He looked up at the tall oak tree beside him, wishing he could climb it into Heaven and be done with all this embarrassment.

"Say something," Hilda said. "They're waiting for you to say something."

Ned began to speak, cleared his throat, faltered, and began again. He could not think of anything to say, so he would just have to say whatever came to mind and hope that his unconscious would carry

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him through. He looked over the heads of the townspeople at the church, stared into the small unpaved alley beside it.

"Well, come on," said a guildsman. The guilds stood together and smiled condescendingly at everyone else.

"I thank all of the electors and all of you who elected the electors who elected me to this office. I don't really understand why I was picked for this . . ."

Something moved in the alley beside the church. Ned could not tell what it was. He averted his eyes, his attention wandered.

". . . but for whatever I do, I shall do my best. I may be mistaken, but I believe that this office confers sacramental powers and responsibilities upon the holder, even if that be the upholding of a tradition most of us have forgotten the meaning of. I imagine this office to represent all the world through God . . ."

The crowd was laughing, guffawing, trying to drown him out with a song. Fat Cravett led with the first verse:

Back and side, go bare, go bare
Both hand and foot go cold,
But belly, God send you good ale enough
Whether it be new or old!

The tattooed girl, her eyes closed and mouth open, tried to unbutton her blouse, but the older women quickly covered her and slapped her face with the backs of their hands.

Ned tried to leave the platform, but the crowd blocked his way. When they had finished their song, they began to chant, "Speech, speech, finish your speech."

"Some think that the presidents used to rule the world, even the outside, even Hell." Ned listened to his words flow, amazed that it was really his voice speaking. "Even the most thoughtless of us—me, for instance—live under the shadow of eternity. All around us lies Hell. We know its geography, its climate, its monsters, as well as we know our own land . . ."

"You may know its monsters," someone from the crowd shouted, "but we don't."

Another voice: "We don't look upon Hell."

"It's bad luck," said an old man holding a mug, his face scrunched up and wrinkled as if he were forever peering at the sun. "And you've certainly got it." Everyone laughed and the younger men patted him on the shoulder.

"You are right," Reverend Surface shouted to Ned. "That office does confer responsibilities upon you. That's why we taunt you and laugh at you. That's why we will love and respect you for a year, even though we may blacken your face now and bloody your skin. Perhaps you will rule over Junction and Hell for us. But they are words from other books, books to which we cannot give complete credence. But we'll take no chances. We'll laugh at the books and obey them, mock them for being apocryphal, love them because they might be God's."

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The crowd cheered, now given excuse to throw mud and dung at the foolspresident.

"April fools," they shouted.

A guildsman, wearing a red cap befitting his rank, beat his chest in mock solemnity. Ned was reminded of his father. Would he be proud or ashamed? Ned asked himself. Beside him, Hilda was teasing a potential customer, another guildsman.

When will they let me down? he asked himself, ducking a clump of dung and grass that passed over his head. Ned could not see his father in the crowd. As he looked, a clump of mud caught him squarely in the face, followed by a dungball.

"Good shot," Miss Jenkens shouted.

"Look at the kingpriest, the foolpresident, the ruler of Hell."

"He's full of shit."

Even Reverend Surface was laughing. He accepted a drink from the burly peasant beside him.

Ned wiped his face and thought about tomorrow. Tomorrow Junction would return to its normal state. It would be quiet and respectable and dull. And the whores would not shout or dangle their breasts from the window-holes. And the Reverend would not laugh. And Ned would be in the Stone House. And everyone would ignore him and pay attention to lifting their hats for the ladies that stank. And the farmers and peasants would be working in the fields, careful not to glance into Hell. The shopkeepers could make money, and the guildsmen could protect their own.

Let them throw their garbage, he thought. He looked at the church and then into the alleyway beside it.

A figure with a plastic face and a yellow beak stood in the alley, ankle deep in muck, and leaned against the church. Its mottled yellow body was covered with eyes, some closed, some blinking, each a different color of Heaven: henna, milori blue, topaz, flourite, viridian, stammel, umber. One iris looked as if it were made of black glass, pure and untainted by the greys of Junction reality. The angel from Hell wore a halo around its head that killed any insect that chanced to be near it.

Ned pointed at the creature when he saw it, but it stepped back into the darkness before anyone could turn around. Ned thought he heard it speak inside his head. It said, *"I am not ready yet."*

The crowd turned to look, found nothing, became angry, and pelted him with more dung and garbage. The outer fringes of the crowd were falling away. People were going home, to an illegal job, a sewing circle, or a whorehouse. As the crowd began to disperse, other people appeared on the street, those who had not wanted to see the foolpresident's inauguration, but were religious enough to make an appearance. Those who had stayed home would spend an extra eternity in Purgatory.

Ned tried to push his way down the platform stairs. The crowd gave

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way a bit and he descended a few steps.

"Wait for me," Hilda said, her arms folded over her breasts to protect them from pinching fingers. "I'm part of this too."

Baldanger shouted and waved his hands to attract Ned's attention. "Wait," he said. "They'll carry you to the Stone House."

Ned pushed at the crowd, trying to bury himself in the mass of sweating flesh and become just another peasant. But what did it matter? he thought. The angel from Hell would find him. But why? And for what?

Hands grabbed his arms and legs, passed him atop the crowd that was shouting, "Take him home, take him home."

About three hundred people made up the homecoming procession. Others were hanging out window-holes of adjacent buildings to see Ned. The crowd held Ned face up to the sky, his legs splayed as far as they would stretch. They carried Hilda behind him, passed her back and forth, squeezed her extra portions of breasts and thigh. Although she screamed and prayed, her nipples stood erect.

Ned watched the sky, examined the strange angles and lines of the buildings that pointed to the sun. He tried not to look at the people hanging out the window-holes. They smiled and leered and shouted at him. An old woman spat at him, spraying his face. He closed his eyes. But he felt his face being pulled to the right.

"*Look at the building,*" said a voice inside his head.

The angel from Hell sat atop one of the old metal buildings on a girder, all eyes open, halo attracting and killing insects.

Or perhaps anything that came near it, Ned thought.

He screamed and closed his eyes, unable to pray.

IV.

ALMOST NONE of the old buildings were left in Junction. Scripture has it that when God raised Hell all around Junction, he also leveled the buildings to cleanse the land from sin. The only buildings that were completely untouched were the Stone House and the Desert Midland Bank. The bank was converted into a church, and the Stone House had become the President's palace.

It was considered a miracle that the churchglass had been left intact after God slapped the land causing the earth to quake and the buildings to fall. It was later on, Ned had been told, and because of Junction's accumulated sins, that the glass cracked and shattered in places. It was sin that caused the third floor to fall. The other old buildings that remained were only skeletons, reminders of God's wrath for future generations.

The Stone House was situated in the middle of Main Street below the shops. Its neatly tended lawn and garden served as a boundary line between "Center City" and the South Side, although both districts

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claimed the landmark as their own. Behind the house stood three small barns and stalls for the oxen and horses. Two of the three barns were in disrepair. The dung heap in the corner of the barnyard was near "Trespassers' Path," and the wealthy guildsmen's wives would delicately place tiny rags to their noses as they passed the contaminated area on their way home.

The large front doors of the Stone House opened into an empty anteroom that led into a hallway. To the left and right were once luxurious sitting rooms and a library without books. A recently constructed staircase led upstairs to the bedrooms. To the rear of the house a small kitchen was connected to a pantry and sunken dining room. A kitchen stairway led into the cellar where food and wine were kept.

Ned Wheeler was sitting in the library waiting for his father and Reverend Surface. The room was bare except for a couch and a few simple wooden chairs. The parquetry on the floor had faded from use, and the stairs leading up to the hallway were due for repairs. A vase of daffodils rested on one of the empty bookshelves that ran the length of the room. A bible, the only book permitted in the house, lay open on the desk. All the other books had been removed decades ago. Above the desk hung a framed photograph; the original subject had long ago bleached into the background.

Looking out the window-hole before him, Ned watched a few people running across the front yard. Probably on their way to church, he thought. He heard a scream, then another. By now the church would be full of supplicants praying for the birdfaced beast's return to Hell. Each would pray that he was not the object of its errand.

But Ned would wait for the messenger from Hell. Now that he was president, he could not outwit his fate.

The library doors opened and Reverend Surface and Ned's father walked into the room. Reverend Surface pulled a chair beside Ned and patted his shoulder. Ned's father nodded, but preferred to stand an uncomfortable distance away from his son.

Ned's first thought was that the Reverend smelled, but that was not the minister's fault, for the clergy were supposed to smell like the people—and Reverend Surface was known to hang around the dung pits and talk with the workers. He wore a black and grey coat of coarse material which was called cary, and his overhood was so full of holes that his hair stuck out of it. His toes peered out of his worn shoes with their thick soles, and his hose hung about his ankles on all sides. Although the church and its vassals held huge amounts of wealth and power, they wore the vestments of the poor.

And the poor accepted it when they were not drunk and in their

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senses, and pretended to believe that only God held the riches death would bring. In the meantime the Desert Midland Bank held the money.

"You, no doubt, know that the creature from Hell is still about in Junction," Reverend Surface said. "Everyone's afraid that the last days have come, and the birdbeast is the messenger. And he just might be . . ."

"It's up to you to meet him," Ned's father said. "He's looking for you. You saw him first. You must see him again." Ned's father was dressed in a simple, loose overshirt with faded brown pants and leather sandals.

"Wait a minute," said the Reverend. "You did tell your father that you saw a beast cross from Hell into Junction. And since you saw him first, it is felt that you should see him again. The people believe that he is looking for you. You are our Jonas."

"But others saw it, too," Ned said.

"That doesn't matter," said the Reverend. "You are the president. Since you hold the power of office and represent us, it is feasible that you would be the one it's looking for. Anyway, everyone is waiting for you to meet it and find out what is to happen."

"It is significant that you saw it first," Ned's father said. "And then you were elected President. Can't you see God's plan? You must follow his orders. You have been chosen."

"Just like that," Ned said.

His father leaned against the bookshelf, resting his arm on the old dark board and running his fingers along the surface of the vase, and solemnly nodded.

Ned looked at Reverend Surface. "And if I don't go? If I stay here? Then what?"

"Well, most of the people are afraid to be out now. The hours are short until dark. But in the morning, when it's safer, they'll gather together and force you out of Junction, push you into Hell. You'll be their sacrifice. You will be the holy lamb tormented in sulphurous flames before the holy angels. Now you have their faith. Tomorrow, if you have failed, they will try to destroy you in desperation and fear of the coming days."

"You must go now," Ned's father said. "Find out what it wants with us. You have been chosen. We will light the church and those who are unafraid to leave home will pray there for you and ourselves. So go now. We will wait."

"There is one thing," said the Reverend. "The beast has been seen in several different places at the same time. Your father suggested that they saw the four holy beasts, Haniel, Kafziel, Azriel, and Aniel, that Ezekiel saw in his holy vision. But I don't think that's so because five beasts had been seen at the same time—as you know, there can be only four holy beasts—and they all looked alike."

"That doesn't matter," Ned's

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father said. "One of the beasts could have been an untrue vision."

"But it is possible that there are more than one, so be forewarned. Anyway, it has been officially decreed that there is but one beast."

Ned curled his lip into a practised sneer and asked, "Why hasn't the Bishop come? I was looking forward to seeing him. And where are the Reverend Priests MacDonald, Briar, Shorter, and Blues? And where's Small Henry?"

"The Bishop doesn't exist, my son," said the Reverend. "And the others are calming the people. For our purposes, you are the Bishop."

He laughed, thinking he would leave the room without saying good-bye and make a good exit. He laughed to conceal his fear and anxiety. But he stopped at the door, thereby spoiling his exit, and asked, "Why can't I just wait here?" As soon as he asked the question, he felt ashamed. He had spoiled his moment, and he already knew the answer.

"Because," Reverend Surface said, "you cannot be sure that the angel from Hell will come for you. It has stayed outside, never once entering a house. And if it were coming here, wouldn't it have already arrived?"

"You must find it," Ned's father said. "That's what it wants. You must seek out the Lord."

Ned felt his face flush. He slipped on the smooth parquetry and did not close the doors behind him.

Outside, the streets were empty. Brushing invisible spiderwebs from his face, he walked down Main Street toward Junction Road. The wind was slight, it tickled him. Children peered down at him from window-holes and greeted him with jeers and shouts. They threw flowers and garbage. Peasants in adjacent buildings praised him and blessed him and sang his songs. But none would step on the street, and some had closed their window-holes with boards in preparation for the miasma of evening.

Playing the hero, Ned marched down Main Street and ignored the occasional bombardments of garbage. In a few minutes it would be dusk. Behind him, the candles in the church were being lit in his honor. Ned thought about Hilda; she was probably hiding in a closet or wasting a tradesman's semen.

As he turned left onto Junction Road, the human sounds became muffled, to be replaced by crickets and birds and the scratching of wind in bush. Ned had never been out of Junction-proper this late—he shivered and walked faster.

And each step brought him closer to Hell. Junction Road ended before the high grass that gave way to the tundra, the grey boundary between order and disorder. Ned wondered if the mountain was still growing, or had it been transformed into something else?

Dusk came quickly and turned into evening, revealing a new moon surrounded by a pale white halo. Ned concentrated on his heels clicking on the old cobblestones overgrown with weeds and grass.

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As the evening deepened, the moon turned from grey to silver, creating shadow-specters that seemed to jump out at Ned.

Fighting an urge to run, Ned stopped to get his bearings. He was almost at the end of Junction Road; before him was tundra, and then Hell.

And the Angel from Hell said, "Hello."

Surprised, Ned screamed and took a step backward. By squinting his eyes, he could make out the outline of the birdbeast standing against the background of high grass. Its beak glinted yellow, and all of its eyes were closed except those that made up its face.

"I've been waiting for you," it said. "Don't worry about my halo; it won't hurt you."

"What do you want?"

"I want you to come with me into Hell."

Ned could almost see the mountains growing behind the birdbeast in the moonlight.

"Yes," the birdbeast said. "They are still growing. Those mountains proved to be quite an obstacle."

Ned noticed that the creature's beak did not move when it spoke, and he wasn't even sure if he was hearing a true voice.

"Are you a creature of God or of Hell? And why do you want me?"

"Because of those mountains. You created them, you know. They've been growing since you imagined them that day."

"I don't believe that."

"And," the birdbeast said, "I'm neither from Heaven nor Hell."

"Then what are you?" Ned asked.

"A lure, I think. The dream stops here. Now we're on our own."

Ned could see the mountains changing behind the birdbeast. The mountains are alive, he thought. They're bears with stone claws and icicle teeth.

And in tempo with the black mountains, the birdbeast began to change into a man. All but two watery eyes disappeared, and his beak turned into a chin that could be construed to be weak. The beast became a short, stocky man with an overlarge mouth and short cropped black hair.

Ned watched the transformation, then screamed.

"This is what I really look like," the man said. "I'm just like you. You don't have to be afraid."

"You're Satan," Ned said. "You change at will. Why do you want me? You're bringing the Last Days, I know that."

"No, I'm not Satan. My name is Kaar Deaken, and I'm just a messenger from another town. A town like Junction, only a thousandfold larger. And that's where I want to take you."

"What if I don't want to come?"

"You have no choice," Deaken said. "If you don't come with me, I'll remain in Junction and the townspeople will push you out to exorcize me."

"But you're a man now," Ned said.

"Shall I change for you again? I

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can change into God's monster, if you like. But we don't have much time, because this is a dream that will begin and end again. You don't have to understand that now. Just come with me. But if I must, I will change into God's beast."

"Then you aren't really from Hell?" Ned wished he hadn't said that—it was the whine of a child needing comfort.

Ned followed Deaken into the tundra. In the moonlight, scattered bushes gave form to the desolation, acted as God's scarecrows to frighten impetuous trespassers. Before them, the mountains appeared to be still growing, reaching for the moon. Deaken hurried toward them, urging Ned to keep up with him.

Deaken stopped a few hundred paces from the mountain wall and said, "I don't know how we will get past them. I came through over there." He pointed at a new mountain growing to fill the empty space, reaching toward the rock faces of its neighbors. "We can't get through there now. By the time we reach it, it will be a mile high." Deaken's eyes darted back and forth, looking for a break in the mountain wall.

Ned watched the mountains moving toward him, bursting out of new ground. Soon everything would be rock and hardpacked dirt. The sky would be blotted out by the sheer bulk of stone.

"The mountains will swallow us," Ned screamed as he turned to run. But new mountains had grown up behind him. Stone arms were reaching out to surround the trespassers. A stone stalagmite pushed out of the ground and touched Ned's hand. It was the seed of a new mountain. "It's growing beneath us," he said.

"We'll never outrun them," Deakne said calmly. The mountains had gained another hundred paces. They would soon merge together, fuse into a single block. "They're real. But you've let them get out of hand. You're afraid of them. Look for a way through; I can't find it."

Ned faced Junction and watched the tiny stalagmites bursting out of the ground in even rows, swelling and merging together to form another mountain wall.

"You won't find it back there," Deaken said. "We haven't been having that dream over and over for you to just return to Junction. The way out must be through those mountains." He pointed at the mountain before him. It had gained another hundred paces.

And Ned found an opening in the rock face. No stalagmites grew in front of it.

Stepping over growing stalagmites that blocked their way, they reached the opening and crawled into the damp tunnel. The opening closed behind them as the mountains fused together. If Deaken was right, Ned thought, and the mountains were real, then he could never go back to Junction.

It was completely dark and slightly damp in the tunnel. Ned

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didn't mind the dampness—he was used to sleeping in a cellar. But the darkness frightened him.

Although Ned was tired and his arms and legs ached, he followed Deaken's droning voice. He could not understand very much of what Deaken was talking about, but he would remember and think about it later. Ned could not tell how long they had been walking. The loss of sight expanded time. Deaken kept up a continuous stream of conversation. Ned remembered Hilda and Sandra and, tired as he was, could feel himself stiffen a bit.

And then Deaken suddenly stopped talking. And Ned was alone.

NED HAD FINISHED shouting. He pressed his back against the cold rock wall and listened to his voice tumble away, echoing before him.

"Deaken, come back." It was almost a whisper. Ned waited for the words to die. He knew that Deaken was not in the tunnel.

Perhaps I had stopped and fallen asleep, Ned thought.

No, he said to himself, as he rubbed his eyes and relished the purple splotches darting across his retinal field. Deaken would not have let him lag behind. Ned had been awake, walking and listening to Deaken speak about Hell and New York City and the future and minds dreaming.

"What you call Hell," he had said, "is a place where physical laws have become indeterminate. Hell is a substance, a quality that can be affected by mind. It is unformed potential, the substratum of reality. Your town Junction exists because people will it, and it remains as small as they believe it must be.

"But there are other things contained in that substance, past realities that remain outside of your vision and mind. Just as, until now, I had remained outside of your vision and mind . . ."

Ned could not understand that. For him, Hell was simply the absence of God. But he thought about it again and fought another spasm of fear. He sat on the cold tunnel floor and talked to himself. His back ached.

I'm alone, he thought. He mouthed the words over and over. But it had been his own unbridled fear that had formed the mountains. He was safe in the tunnel. It was a place to be alone. And if he was alone, he rationalized to himself, then he could not be harmed. The thoughts comforted him, reminded him that he was tired and hungry.

"Since the world is indeterminate," Deaken had said, "the arbitrary distinctions of time are of no use. Clock time becomes dream time—a state very much akin to Jung's collective unconscious, where past, present, and future exist in simultaneous potentiality. Time can no longer be thought of as a progression or a straight line. It is a loop. The whole world of experience consists of loops. There is a loop for each memory sequence. One remembers the

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future—that's a loop. But one might not remember the same future as others. Overlaps are haphazard. They could only be consistent if one mind was providing continuity.

"Perhaps one mind is *providing continuity . . ."*

Even after Deaken had explained Jung and determinism, Ned could not understand why Deaken did not see the obvious: tomorrow comes after today, and dreams are made of sleep.

And sleep is made of darkness, Ned thought, but the darkness of the tunnel still frightened him. Pressing his palms against his eyes, he waited for the familiar purple splotches to appear on his retinal walls. This time the flourite spots were richer and more intense. He waited until they filled his entire field of vision and then opened his eyes. Before him, the tunnel was aglow with phosphorescent light which provided security and humid warmth. Ned noticed that the walls were smooth, without seams or cracks. And he had forgotten about his hunger.

He walked into the fluorite light, stretching his arms before him. He felt comfortable and secure. But as he walked, he began to feel a chill wind on his back, pushing him on with icicle feelers. Behind him it was dark.

"Telepathy and psi phenomena," Deaken had said, "did not seem to obey the laws of physics. But now that physical laws in the past are gradually becoming more indeterminate, psi has become more consistent.

"Every night eleven million, five hundred and seventeen thousand people in New York City are dreaming about Junction. And you. Every night they remember the future. Everyone, every child and adult. That's why I've come for you. Perhaps that will stop the dreams. All the dreams are centered on you. What will we dream when you are in our present . . . ?"

Ned could not understand how so many people could live in one place. He imagined that New York City was a huge monster of flesh and steel and glass waiting for him at the end of the tunnel. Its metal jaws were ready to swallow him and make him join the screaming crowds that lived in its pores.

I could turn the tunnel into Junction, Ned thought. Ned had made the mountains and the tunnel, Deaken had said. This tunnel led into the past, into New York. And New York City was real. But he could return to Junction right now and be squeezing Hilda and sucking Sandra. But that would not be real, Ned thought. That would only be a place in my mind.

He felt a chill draw across his spine. He told himself not to think about the mountains or Junction. The fears he had been repressing would produce monsters in the darkness behind him. And once created, they would eat him.

Before him, at the end of the tunnel, was New York City. That

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place was real—it was not in his mind. And behind him was Junction. That place, too, was real—it had spawned him.

But Ned wasn't quite sure. If Junction wasn't real. . . . He didn't want to think about it. If nothing was real but himself, he would be left with monsters.

He quickened his step.

Ned could see the end of the tunnel. It was a black dot that grew larger with every step. He forced himself to keep walking and let it draw him into its mouth. The chill breeze behind him ruffled his clothes. Ned could not turn back now: darkness and mountains blocked his way to Junction. The mountains were real. They had become independent of their creator. They were permanent. Turning around would be more frightening than going forward.

Ned hoped he would not meet his dreams. His only chance to return to Junction lay somewhere in the growing darkness ahead.

A tiny light flickered at the end of the tunnel. It turned red, then green, and blinked out. And the phosphorescent light was becoming dim, losing its power and warmth. It was being sucked into the darkness ahead. As Ned soon would be.

Ned fought a self-destructive urge to turn around and face the blackness. Its presence was so near that he thought he could touch it and grasp it if he outstretched his arm. He imagined it would be cold and wet. It was a tail looped behind him, pushing him forward into its wet mouth.

He screamed and ran to the end of the tunnel, hoping for death and purgation and the blond face of God. Instead, he found himself beside a subway train screaming to a halt.

People were milling around him, clawing each other, pushing for a better position, trying to reach the glass and metal doors that would soon slide shut. Men in suits, holding briefcases close to their chests, burst out of the cars first, pushing eager entrants out of the way. The men were followed by women in business suits and girls wearing sweaters and dungarees, ladies in shorts and torn stockings, some holding babies with grey faces and screaming obscenities, others quiet and shy. But they all had to fight the onrushing mob pushing and squeezing through the rubber-trimmed doors.

Ned was wet with perspiration; his coarse overshirt clung to his skin. It was in the high nineties in the subway station. He looked around for an exit. He had to get away from these people, from their pushing arms and fetid breath and sweat-clogged clothes. And they looked outlandish and frightening in their business costumes.

He spied an escalator ahead, its metal steps climbing forever. Perhaps the moving stairs were a stairway to Heaven, Ned thought, and then screamed as the train noisily left the station. The chalk and blackboard sound of steel

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grinding steel. And another train screamed to a halt in its place, a shining metal warrior hungering to fill up the empty space.

Ned pushed toward the moving stairs, his hands clasped to his chest and elbows raised like fins to swim through a new rush of people. It was truly a monster, Ned thought. All of these people, breathing through a thousand mouths, sweating in a million places, might as well be one.

"Hey, it's Ned," an overweight schoolgirl said to her companion. They were both dressed in identical blue sailor outfits.

"Hey, look, it's Ned," they shouted at the crowd as they ran after him.

Ned ran for a door made of iron bars. Beyond the door was a stairway in a metal cage filled with people hurrying up and down. Some turned to look at Ned.

"It's the one in the dreams," shouted a man in a faded blue suit, acne sores and collar rash visible on his neck.

"Well, get him," shouted a young woman carrying an arm load of books.

Ned ran past the turnstiles, pushed his way through the door, and was pulled into the waiting crowd. Poking and pushing, it reached out for him.

A boy in a torn, black leather jacket crawled through the crowd that had formed around Ned. He stood up and grabbed Ned's arm. The boy had a smooth, unshaven face, and his greasy black hair was combed back into a pony-tail. Other boys wearing black leather jackets appeared, and they pushed him through the crowd.

Arms reached out toward his face. Ned tried to disengage himself from the youths, but they held him too tightly. Someone hit him in the face. Numbness. He spat out a tooth and swallowed salty blood. Closing his eyes in fear and resignation, he let the crowd pummel him.

"Come on, man," said an olive skinned boy with high cheekbones and sunken cheeks. "We can't drag you up the stairs."

"Up the stairs, we got Ned. Shit, we got Ned."

"Get out of the way," shouted the smooth faced boy at anyone who might try to stop them. He waved his gravity knife and the crowd opened to let him pass. "Chicken bastards, we got Ned. And we're all going to Junction."

Ned opened his eyes and concentrated on the golden bear embossed on the black leather jacket before him. The boys were all around him. Ned smelled their pomade and wondered if it was a strange blend of black honey. Perhaps they crushed the bees and black raisins into it. Ned found it difficult to breathe. Phlegm solidified in his nostrils.

The crowd followed the gang that held Ned. They seemed to be waiting for the right moment. They shouted, and, gaining confidence, began punching the youths. One of the boys fired a pistol into the

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crowd. That drove the crowd into a frenzy. Ned turned to watch a group of young girls pull the smooth faced boy down the stairs. They scratched his face and kicked him with small, deft strokes.

As the gang toughs were swallowed by the crowd, Ned tried to propel himself forward to the top of the stairs. But ready arms were waiting to seize him and pass him through the crowd. Together all the selfish entities made up a synergetic, unselfish whole. They were content to handle Ned for a few seconds, perhaps scratch and gouge him, and then pass him on.

Behind him, Ned could hear the crowd chanting, "Get the Dreamer, Ned. Ned. Ned's ahead. Ned's ahead. Get the Dreamer before he's dead."

And someone started singing a familiar song:

Back and side, go bare, go bare
Both hand and foot go cold,
But belly, God send you good ale enough
Whether it be new or old!

"Let him alone," cried a nun dressed in white with a black cowl that framed her pink face.

Others took up the song, and it spread through the crowd. "Don't hurt him, don't hurt him. He's the president, bim, bim, bim."

"He's the president?" shrieked the nun, and then she fainted.

Fifty feet from the stairway, they dropped him to the floor. A fat woman wearing bright orange lipstick sat on his chest and pushed her breasts together. Ned gagged from the sudden weight and closed his eyes. But this huge room on the main floor was etched under his eyelids; for a few seconds it would remain intact, a fading image soon to be relegated to memory.

The ceiling was high and crusted with carbon. Cement slabs and temporary, makeshift rooms broke up the parallel attraction of perspective lines. A hamburger stand with tiny stools and smeared plexiglass containers on the counter faced metal doors and compartments and turnstiles. Numbered luggage lockers lined the walls, jutted out to provide corners and alleys. Overhead signs and arrows pointed to the IRT and BMT and D and N and RR. Sharp contrasts of black and white, shadow and light. A cave lit by bare lightbulbs.

Ned moved his arms close to his body to protect his hands from clumsy feet. But they would kill him, anyway, he thought. The scum on the floor bunched up under his fingers. Ned knew if he opened his eyes, he would see the sticky city dust falling through the air. He thought about metal. It fascinated him. It reflected faces and lights and sparkled, yet would not break like glass.

He visualized a large window fronting an underground record store on the far side of the room. Latin music blared out of nowhere. Could this be Heaven, he thought, with glass and music played by invisible musicians?

Thoughts jammed into his mind.

"It's a phonograph. That's what

(Continued on page 93)

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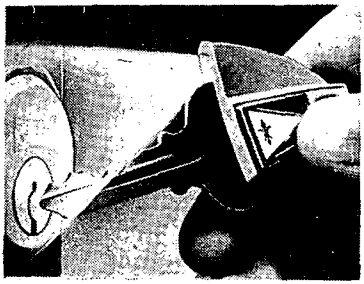

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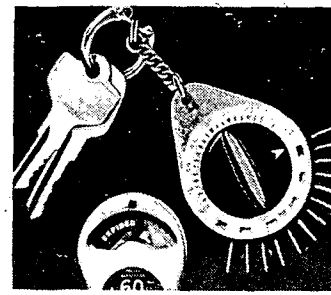

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FRITZ LEIBER

Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser are back! Fafhrd (in a solo venture of his youth) made his last appearance here in the novella, "The Snow Women" (April, 1970). Now both heroes find themselves, in search of amatory dalliance—

TRAPPED IN THE SHADOWLAND

Illustrated by MIKE KALUTA

FAFHRD AND THE Gray Mouser were almost dead from thirst. Their horses had died from the same Hell-throated ailment at the last waterhole, which had proved dry. Even the last contents of their waterbags, augmented by water of their own bodies, had not been enough to keep alive the dear dumb equine beasts. As all men know, camels are the only creatures who can carry men for more than a day or two across the almost supernaturally hot arid deserts of the World of Nehwon.

They tramped on south-westward under the blinding sun and over the burning sand. Despite their desperate plight and heat-fevered minds and bodies, they were steering a canny course. Too far south and they would fall into the cruel hands of the emperor of the Eastern Lands, who would find rare delight in torturing them before killing them. Too far east and they would encounter the merciless Mingols of the Steppes and other horrors. West and northwest were those who were pursuing them now. While north and northeast lay the Shadowland, the home of Death himself. So much they well knew of the geography of Nehwon.

Meanwhile, Death grinned faintly in his low castle in the heart of the Shadowland, certain that he had at last got the two elusive heroes in his bony grip. They had years ago had the nerve to enter his domain, visiting their first loves, Ivrian and Vlana, and even stealing from his very castle Death's favorite mask. Now they would pay for their temerity.

Death had the appearance of a tall, handsome young man, though somewhat cadaverous and of opalescent complexion. He was staring now at a large map of the Shadow-

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land and its environs set in a dark wall of his dwelling. On this map Fafhrd and the Mouser were a gleaming speck, like an errant star or fire beetle, south of the Shadowland.

Death writhed his thin, smiling lips and moved his bony fingertips in tiny, cabalistic curves, as he worked a small but difficult magic.

His incantation done, he noted with approval that on the map a southern tongue of the Shadowland was visibly extending itself in pursuit of the dazzling speck that was his victims.

Fafhrd and the Mouser tramped on south, staggering and reeling now, their feet and minds aflame, their faces a-drip with precious sweat. They had been seeking, near the Sea of Monsters and the City of Ghouls, their strayed newest girls, Mouser's Reetha and Fafhrd's Kreeshkra, the latter a Ghoul herself, all her blood and flesh invisible, which made her bonny pink bones stand out the more, while Reetha believed in going naked and shaven from head to toe, a taste which gave the girls a mutual similarity and sympathy.

But the Mouser and Fafhrd had found nothing but a horde of fierce male Ghouls, mounted on equally skeletal horses, who had chased them east and south, either to slay them, or to cause them to die of thirst in the desert or of torture in the dungeons of the King of Kings.

It was high noon and the sun was hottest. Fafhrd's left hand touched in the dry heat a cool fence about

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two feet high, invisible at first though not for long.

"Escape to damp coolth," he said in a cracked voice.

They eagerly clambered over the fence and threw themselves down on a blessed thick turf of dark grass two inches high, over which a fine mist was falling. They slept about ten hours.

In his castle Death permitted himself a thin grin, as on his map the south-trending tongue of the Shadowland touched the diamond spark and dimmed it.

Nehwon's greatest star, Astorian, was mounting the eastern sky, precursor of the moon, as the two adventurers awoke, greatly refreshed by their long nap. The mist had almost ceased, but the only star visible was vast Astorian.

The Mouser sprang up agitatedly in his gray hood, tunic, and ratskin shoes. "We must escape backward to hot dryth," he said, "for this is the Shadowland, Death's homeland."

"A very comfortable place," Fafhrd replied, stretching his huge muscles luxuriously on the thick greensward. "Return to the briny, granular, rasping, fiery land-sea? Not I."

"But if we stay here," the Mouser countered, "we will be will-lessly drawn by devilish and delusive will-o-the-wisps to the low-walled Castle of Death, whom we defied by stealing his mask and giving its two halves to our wizards Sheelba and Ningauble, an action for which Death is not likely to love us. Besides, here we might well meet our two first girls, Ivrian and Vlana, now concubines of Death, and that would not be a pleasant experience."

Fafhrd winced, yet stubbornly repeated, "But it is comfortable here." Rather self-consciously he writhed his great shoulders and restretched his seven feet on the deliciously damp turf. (The "seven feet" refers to his height. He was by no means an octopus missing one limb, but a handsome, red-bearded, very tall barbarian.)

The Mouser persisted, "But what *if* your Vlana should appear, blue-faced and unloving? Or my Ivrian in like state, for that matter?"

That dire image did it. Fafhrd sprang up, grabbing for the low fence. But—lo and behold—there was no fence at hand. In all directions stretched out the damp, dark green turf of the Shadowland. While the soft drizzle had thickened again, hiding Astorian. There was no way to tell directions.

The Mouser searched in his ratskin pouch and drew out a blue bone needle. He pricked himself finding it, and cursed. It was wickedly sharp at one end, round and pierced at the other.

"We need a pool or puddle," he said.

"Where did you get that toy?" Fafhrd quizzed. "Magic, eh?"

"From Nattick Nimblefingers the Tailor in vasty Lankhmar," the Mouser responded. "Magic, nay! Hast heard of compass needles, oh wise one?"

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Not far off they found a shallow puddle atop the turf. The Mouser carefully floated his needle on the small mirror of clear, placid water. It spun about slowly and eventually settled itself.

"We go that way," Fafhrd said, pointing out from the pierced end of the needle. "South." For he realized the pricking end must point toward the heart of the Shadowland—Nehwon's Death Pole, one might call it. For an instant he wondered if there were another such pole at the antipodes—perhaps a Life Pole.

"And we'll still need the needle," the Mouser added, pricking himself again and cursing as he pouched it, "for future guidance."

"Hah! Wah-wah-wah-*hah!*" yelled three berserks, emerging like fleet statues from the mist. They had been long marooned in the skirts of the Shadowland, reluctant either to advance to the Castle of Death and find their Hell or Valhalla, or to seek escape, but always ready for a fight. They rushed at Fafhrd and the Mouser, bare-skinned and naked-bladed.

It took the Twain ten heartbeats of clashing sword-fight to kill them, though killing in the domain of Death must be at least a misdemeanor, it occurred to the Mouser—like poaching. Fafhrd got a shallow slash wound across his biceps, which the Mouser carefully bound up.

"Wow!" said Fafhrd. "Where did the needle point? I've got turned around."

They located the same or another puddle-mirror, floated the needle, again found South, and then took up their trek.

They twice tried to escape from the Shadowland by changing course, once east, once west. It was no use. Whatever way they went, they found only soft-turfed earth and bemisted sky. So they kept on south, trusting Nattick's needle.

For food they cut out black lambs from the black flocks they encountered, slew, bled, skinned, dressed, and roasted the tender meat over fires from wood of the squat black trees and bushes here and there. The young flesh was succulent. They drank dew.

Death in his low-walled keep continued to grin from time to time at his map, as the dark tongue of his territory kept magically extending southwest, the dimmed spark of his doomed victims in its margin.

He noted that the Ghoulish cavalry originally pursuing the Twain had halted at the boundary of his marchland.

But now there was the faintest trace of anxiety in Death's smile. And now and again a tiny vertical frown creased his opalescent, unwrinkled forehead, as he exerted his faculties to keep his geographical sorcery going.

The black tongue kept on down the map, past Sarheenmar and thievish Ilthmar to the Sinking Land. Both cities on the shore of the Inner Sea were scared unto death by the dark invasion of damp

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turf and misty sky, and they thanked their degenerate gods that it narrowly bypassed them.

And now the black tongue crossed the Sinking Land, moving due west. The little frown in Death's forehead had become quite deep. At the Swamp Gate of Lankhmar the Mouser and Fafhrd found their magical mentors waiting, Sheelba of the Eyeless Face and Ningauble of the Seven Eyes.

"What have you been up to?" Sheelba sternly asked the Mouser.

"And what have *you* been doing?" Ningauble demanded of Fafhrd.

The Mouser and Fafhrd were still in the Shadowland, and the two wizards outside it, with the boundary midway between. So their conversation was like that of two pairs of people on opposite sides of a narrow street, on the one side of which it is raining cats and dogs, the other side dry and sunny, though in this instance stinking with the smog of Lankhmar.

"Seeking Reetha," the Mouser replied, honestly for once.

"Seeking Kreeshkra," Fafhrd said boldly, "but a mounted Ghoul troop harried us back."

From his hood Ningauble writhed out six of his seven eyes and regarded Fafhrd searchingly. He said severely, "Kreeshkra, tired of your untameable waywardness, has gone back to the Ghouls for good, taking Reetha with her. I would advise you instead to seek Frix," naming a remarkable female who had played no small part in the adventure of the rat-hordes, the same affair in which Kreeshkra the Ghoul girl had been involved.

"I have heard that Frix is a brave and handsome woman," Fafhrd temporized, "but how to reach her? She's in another world, if what I have been told be true."

"While I counsel that *you* seek Hisvet," Sheelba of the Eyeless Face told the Mouser grimly. The unfeatured blackness in *his* hood grew yet blacker (with concentration) if that were possible. He was referring to yet another female involved in the rat-adventure, in which Reetha also had been a leading character.

"A great idea, Father," responded the Mouser, who made no bones about preferring Hisvet to all other girls, particularly since he had never once enjoyed her favors, though on the verge of doing so several times. "But she is likely deep in the earth and in her rat-size persona. How would I do it? How, how?"

If Sheel and Ning could have smiled, they would have.

However, Sheelba said only, "It is bothersome to see you both bemisted, like heroes in smoke."

He and Ning, without conference, collaborated in working a small but very difficult magic. After resisting most tenaciously, the Shadowland and its drizzle retreated east, leaving the Twain in the same sunshine as their mentors. Though two invisible patches of dark mist remained, entering into

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the flesh of the Mouser and Fafhrd and closing forever around their hearts.

Far eastaways, Death permitted himself a small curse which would have scandalized the high gods, had they heard it. He looked daggers at his map and its shortening black tongue. For Death, he was in a most bitter temper. Foiled again!

Ning and Sheel worked another diminutive wizardry.

Without warning, Fafhrd shot upwards in the air, growing tinier and tinier, until at last he was lost to sight.

Without moving from where he stood, the Mouser also grew tiny, until he was somewhat less than a foot high, of a size to cope with Hisvet, in or out of bed. He dove into the nearest rathole.

Neither feat was as remarkable as it sounds, since Nehwon is only a bubble rising through the waters of infinity.

The two heroes each spent a delightful weekend with his lady of the week.

"I don't know why I do things like this," Hisvet said, lisping faintly and touching the Mouser intimately as they lay side by side supine on silken sheets. "It must be because I loathe you."

"A pleasant and even worthy encounter," Frix confessed to Fafhrd in similar situation. "It is my hangup to enjoy playing, now and then, with the lower animals. Which some would say is a weakness in a queen of the air."

Their weekend done, Fafhrd and the Mouser were automatically magicked back to Lankhmar, encountering one another in Cheap Street near Nattick Nimblefinger's narrow and dirty-looking dwelling. The Mouser was his right size again.

"You look sunburned," he observed to his comrade.

"Space-burned, it is," Fafhrd corrected. "Frix lives in a remarkably distant land. But you, old friend, look paler than your wont."

"Shows what three days underground will do to a man's complexion," the Mouser responded. "Come, let's have a drink at the Silver Eel."

Ningauble in his cave near Ilthmar and Sheelba in his mobile hut in the Great Salt Marsh each smiled, though lacking the equipment for that facial expression. They knew they had laid one more obligation on their proteges.

—FRITZ LEIBER

ON SALE NOW IN OCTOBER AMAZING

JOHN BRUNNER'S BRILLIANT NEW NOVEL-THE STONE THAT NEVER CAME DOWN, WILLIAM ROTSLER'S NEW NOVELET-THE GODS OF ZAR, NEW SHORT STORIES, **THE SUN-HUNTERS** by **DAPHNE CASTELL,** and **ABDICATION** by **C. L. GRANT;** also many new features.

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BARRY N. MALZBERG

Barry Malzberg's cynical talent has won for him the first John W. Campbell Memorial Award (for his novel, Beyond Apollo*), to what must be his equally cynical delight (the novel would surely never have won John Campbell's approval). Here Malzberg again exhibits and exploits his talent for cynicism with three delightful conceits, brief and pointed, caught together in a—*

TRIPTYCH

Illustrated by JOE STATON

1. SCENES FROM A COSMIC NOVEL

I

2156: Sorting out his thoughts in his private room, Jim Watkins, the young psychiatrist who is the founder and administrator of the First School For Extra-ordinary Children feels a flicker of fear: will the young geniuses, when they have been trained to the fullest use of their potentialities, turn against their Keepers, the ordinary humans, and take over the world? Watkins can see the possibility of this as he rubs his slim, nervous hands together, one against the other; the children are benign now but there is no saying how far their training will take them and common humanity, looked at objectively and over the long run, has a very poor case to be made for it. Trained geniuses, with all human potentiality and history within their grasp, will like it even less. "I can't stand it," the handsome young administrator murmurs, "I mean, I just couldn't stand being known as the greatest traitor in the course of history," beads of sweat coming out to moisten his tense upper limit . . . but then he has a new thought. He remembers his last conversation with Eugene, the oldest and most sympathetic of the geniuses, just two days ago. "And we will always be grateful to you, Jimmy," Eugene had said in that affectionate way he always had when he was being open and frank, "for what you have done for us," and looking at the boy Watkins had known then as he must surely know now, that no harm could possibly come to the keepers from the geniuses. How could it? For the nature of man,

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Watkins has always believed, is essentially good and if that nature can be brought to the fore without penalty, without threat, without jealousy and fear, then the geniuses will indeed evolve into a race of men so great that they will have only love for those they will recall as their benefactors.

"Yes, yes, yes," Watkins says to himself, his pleasant features relaxed at last from their strain, and putting his pipe aside prepares himself for rest and the vast and busy tasks that lie ahead of him as he and his hand-selected staff prepare the geniuses for their destiny.

II

2030: On his way into the asteroid belt, the captain of the first Jovian expedition remembers that he is not quite sure whether he did or did not shut off the tap in the bleak, furnished room that had been his quarters during final training. This series of nagging doubts builds from obsession to the point where they start to drive him quite mad but he could hardly use the communicator to ask someone from the control base to check this out for him. There is simply no way to phrase it. They would take him for a madman and remove him immediately from his captaincy. (This suspicion is part of his psychosis but, of course, the captain cannot grasp this.) The thought of the water, the steady, ominous dripping of the water, flooding inexorably his closed basin (he is not sure that

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he opened the drain) and spilling out then in small puddles and rivulets to overtake his room, the building, the neighborhood, the space center and at last the world, overtakes the captain and renders him unable to verify certain basic manuevers he must enact when coming into Jupiter orbit and resultantly the ship, with all aboard, is trapped by gravity and falls into the outermost gaseous layer of that planet, bringing the mission to a mysterious and terrible end whose cause is not understood until 2215 when the fifteenth series of Historical Reinvestigations is brought to a successful conclusion.

III

2101: Nora confronts her husband, still with that smug and abused grin on his features, now rearing above her, his eyes bleak and distant, and says, with the perfect knowledge of accusation, "it wasn't me at all this time, it hasn't been me for months, you've been using that simulator again," and she knows she is right, she has never been wrong about him, the grin collapses down the panels of his face, his eyes come dimly into focus again and mumbling and grumbling in a shamed way, he lifts himself from the couch, heading toward his own rooms, but he must have been so disconcerted by her realization of what he had taken to be his secret that he exits from the wrong doorway and in the flicker of the evacuation unit, Nora realizes that he has come to an embarrassing end.

She wonders whether or not to call the authority and make a full and free admission but decides that two disasters do not retrieve a wrong, so only advises the authority at the next checking-cycle that her husband, despondent for a long time, has incinerated himself. The authority does not question this and, after a few more days of remorse, Nora decides to try the simulator herself. After all, it has been very well recommended by some friends of hers and there is no gainsaying that her husband had had a very successful experience. Perhaps she had only been selfish in feeling that he ought to have had his experiences with her, but then, it had not been she who stepped into the incinerator. *At the end we must live out our own death so why not seek difference in the interval?* Nora thinks obscurely, and arranges an appointment with the simulator that very afternoon. It is illegal, of course, but she uses her husband's contacts and there is no problem.

IV

2250: The geniuses, ruthlessly breeding the Norms out of existence, reach a cul de sac when their mathematicians compute that the rate of population-alteration is finite and no matter what they do, they will never comprise more than two-fifths of the population, due to the perversity and lust of the remaining three-fifths. A decision must be reached, therefore, as to whether or not to resort to more

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violent and direct measures to eliminate the Norms and a council meeting is called for that very afternoon at the Mid-Continental Plant. Orbiting toward that meeting Eugene, now one hundred and fifteen years old with a life-expectancy of four hundred more years but still (for cheap political reasons) not yet leader of the geniuses, realizes the essential corruption and brutality of the life-choices they have so easily assumed. "I will have no further part of this; we have betrayed our ideals," Eugene reminisces and runs a hand over his briefcase which contains a powerful bomb of his own invention timed to explode during the meeting of the Council and kill everyone within a five-thousand mile radius of the detonation. "Am I not right?" he thinks further, and then uses his pocket-simulator to create an environment in which the explosion will have already occurred and he can thus gauge his reactions. According to the simulator, he will feel completely justified although somewhat guilty and, of course dead, since he must be within range of the explosion. "So be it then," Eugene says, turning off the simulator, "so be it and an end to the mad vision of a world of geniuses," and knows with relief that he has kept the pledge made to his keeper, Jimmy Watkins, so very long ago as the craft accelerates toward its destination and ever so delicately, Eugene feels the stigmata of knowledge oozing from his palms.

v

2923: On the third round through the Transference Point, Hayes, the routing clerk, misplaces Neptune which instantly appears midway between the orbits of Earth and Moon; resultant gravitational stresses create an almost instant series of cosmic disasters which brings the sad but interesting saga of humanity to an end. "Damn it, that was stupid of me," Hayes says, "but whoever said I was a fucking genius?" and reaches for his simulator to get him out of this but too damned late now and by a longshot.

2. FAULT

BY LATE SUNDAY they had gotten all of the town evacuated, the last town in the area to close down and the job seen done. But then word came through that one old man was holding out, an old man on the tenth floor of the central project who said that he would be damned if hysteria was going to chase him out and in the bargain he had nowhere to go. I was sent out to talk with him on about three hours' leeway.

Ordinarily, I suppose, they would have let it go; one old man rattling around fifty-five floors of the project has little significance in the best of circumstances and from the legal standpoint, of course, he had a right to domain. But it was bad, very bad at that time: the press had ringed the area, of course, and (always from a safe distance) was ready to do a series of last-holdout stories, last-survivor-at-bay and so

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on, which, under the circumstances, would have made us look very bad, raised questions which the quick and almost total evacuation was supposed to cover. So I was detailed to get into the projects and escort him out. It looked like a relatively simple job: he was one harmless old man, after all, whose family had all left as evacuees and were, at that moment, in the center with a few thousand others, telling everyone who cared to listen that grandpa had always been stubborn but that was all it meant, a little case of stubbornness and in due time, they were sure, he would come out like the rest of them. But I had a feeling that it was not going to be a simple job and for reasons best not gone into I packed a gun along with the emergency kit when I took the transporter in. I did not want to use force to get him out but on the other hand, everything considered, I decided I would if I had to. The fault was going to open and the project (and everything else for ten square miles around) was going to fall through and that was all right, we had compensated for it, we had the natural-disaster theory well in operation and it looked like it was going to hold but one old man in that project when it went through the earth might change the perspective a bit. The nature of human beings I have noticed is that they do not respond to abstracts as they do to particulars and one dead old man was a particular.

I found him easily, hanging the transporter outside the block at the tenth level and crawling through an access chute. He was in the apartment, his possessions lined around him, his eyes peculiarly bright as he hunched between the television set and his mattress, inspecting me. The set was on to a local outlet which had been covering nothing else that week, of course, and he was listening about himself. "No," he said, putting his hands to his ears, a peculiar gesture when I came before him, "I'm not going to go with you. I know what you've worked out and I know what your plans are but I'm staying right here."

Johnson. William F. Johnson, 73, born in Brooklyn, resident of Chicago, Abilene, and points west, come to rest in Escondido so many years later. They always have ordinary names and a series of stops on the way, the ones who hold out. I have noticed this. Then again, the ones who cooperate also have ordinary names and travels so this is a theory which may apply to all of California and not merely William F. Johnson. Procedure. Operate within the limits of procedure until matters are proven otherwise. "I'm sorry," I said, "you've got to come with me. If you've been watching television you know the situation. The fault is opening up."

"I heard all about that on television," William F. Johnson said in his high, partially-deaf old man's voice. "I don't believe a word of it. This project was built thirty years ago; they swore it wasn't over nothing and anyway the engineers

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had that whole problem solved. Now you come in here and make everybody move because it seems there was a mistake. There was no mistake. I'm staying right in here; two weeks from now I'll be laughing at everybody. Get out of here, son."

"Three hours," I said, "it's going to open in three hours."

"What's that? Three hours? I heard that on the television; I don't believe it. Anyway, you couldn't have it charted out like that. Who can tell?"

"It's all charted," I said quietly, "it's part of the Richter scale. Seismography is an exact science now." Not that he would know what I was saying. Keep talking, however, keep them interested, distracted. I took him by an elbow, plucked at his frail sleeve, pulled gently. He came out of the chair like a handful of ashes, stumbling against the mattress. "Let's go," I said.

"I won't," he said, "you can't do this to me. I signed a lease. This is my place; all of them moved in as subtenants on me, I have a right—"

"You have no right to die," I said and putting on some pressure took him toward the chute where the transporter hovered. "All you wanted really was to know that it was the truth, didn't you? For someone to come out and take you. Am I right?"

"No," he said, "you're not right," trembling against me and then he said, "all right, yes, you're right, I just wanted someone to tell me, I couldn't believe it was true, that this was happening to me, that it was really going to open up; they swore it would never happen, they *said* it couldn't happen, they gave me papers—"

Babbling. He was babbling. Better that, however, than resistance and the need for the gun. I pushed him into the transporter where he fell heavily and heaved myself against him, hit the controls. "It's okay," I said as ascent began, "you'll be relocated. We'll replace the stuff."

"I don't want it replaced," William F. Johnson said and "this is my life you're taking me away from, don't you understand that?" and "they promised that the fault was under control, we'd never hear of it," and, "tell me, tell me this one thing: how can people who can tell to the *minute* when it's going to open like you say you can, how could they have moved us into this in the first place?" and no answer to that really, no answer for William F. Johnson, the transporter moving into the air, now almost a mile over the project, the gleaming track of the fault now, through some aspect of height or vision, seeming to be painted in the red of implication as I took the Last Survivor out to safety, all of Escondido waiting to greet him.

3. A CHECKLIST

THE CAPTAIN: He is a tall, grim man with determined eyes and a faint slouch well compensated by vigorously conscious efforts to stand straight. The Antares system

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poses no challenge to him whatsoever: many years ago he lost power on his small craft in the asteroid belt and drifted helpless for hours amidst the rocks and pellets, out of radio contact, alone with his thoughts. His control had been tight. "Everything is okay," he said quietly when the frantic engineers had re-established contact, "nothing hurts if you keep your mind perfectly empty." He had then been talked through a calm and brilliant set of maneuvers which brought him back safely to Mars. No one had believed that his mind was actually blank during those hours in the asteroids. Medical staff asked him, "didn't you cry? didn't you pray? didn't you regret your life or at least consider it a lot?" He insisted that he had not and finally staff had gone away from this, citing the captain as remarkable which he surely is.

If the Bureau thinks this new voyage to the Antares system is important and has appointed him to command, he accepts the conditions. He is pleased to utilize his training to its fullest and be of service although in the past Bureau has occasionally made assignments which were mistakes.

This will be his last voyage before retirement. He will write his memoirs. He has never had sexual contact with anything other than his palm and (later) a small, steel cup which is his prized possession but no one even thinks of this and his sexual activities play no part in the story.

THE ALIENS: They are creatures of the Antares system: cruel, technologically-advanced individuals who have embarked upon a modest plan of conquest. While some of their fleets voyage toward Betelgeuse, others remain in constant orbit in and around Antares to protect against the possibility of invasion. They are paranoid and decadent. Most of their technological wonders were left them by ancestors with, perhaps, a more elevated moral code. The general orders of the orbiting crews are to repel and destroy any alien fleet which approaches their system. In the past, this has led to mistakes and embarrassment because the patrols, in their eagerness to achieve a reputation, have destroyed some of their own craft returning from missions of conquest.

No invasion of their system has, in fact, ever occurred, but this does not deter the patrollers who are the most paranoid of the race and are convinced that at any time a malevolent ship will appear. (There are rich ideas of reference here and reaction-formation as well; psychological elements which, however interesting, cannot be part of the story.) They sight the Terran ship with the help of their wondrous, if only dimly understood devices, when the Terrans are still three full light years away.

THE EDITOR: He is a tall, grim man with determined eyes and a perpetual overstock. His posture is

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sloppy but now and then he remembers to brace. He has been known to corner writers at parties to tell them that they have lost their original sense of wonder and are trying to subvert, through pointless cynicism, all of the original purposes of the field.

In order to please him it will be necessary, thus, to point out that the aliens' decadence is an outcome of their stupidity and that if they had understood the true engineering principles behind their devices they might have been able to accomplish their purposes. As it is, they never really had a chance. The captain and crew of the Terran ship must win out and the outcome is never truly in doubt because they are more ingenious than the aliens to say nothing of more courageous and are interested in *how* their materials work whereas the aliens are simply concerned with what they can *do*.

The editor pays four cents a word on acceptance plus a bonus when inclined but has been known to have held purchased material in inventory for long periods, sometimes for many years, thereby hampering the possibility of book rights. This will be kept in mind but can, unfortunately, play no plot-role.

THE CREW: They are all engineers except for one bio-technician who writes bad poetry in his off-hours and during the battle scenes evinces a certain sentimentality toward the aliens. The bio-technician is held in some contempt by his colleagues who nevertheless must tolerate him for only he knows how to administer the great hydroponics devices which underlie the life-support system of the craft and thus the purposes of the mission.

As an economy measure, and also to promote unity among the crew, they all share the more menial tasks of the mission: mucking out the evacuation vaults for instance, engine maintenance, the various recycling tasks. In this way elitism is discouraged and the captain, no less than any of the others, mucks out. The aliens, on the other hand, carry aboard their ships a group of hereditary slaves to perform the menial tasks since this, they believe, will free their skills to higher purposes.

The slaves on the alien ships are happy in their work and almost save the day during the great battle but the alien engineers will not take their advice, being culturally unequipped to accept the slaves as equal . . . and it is at this point that the battle begins decisively to turn for the Terrans.

THE BATTLE: The Earth ship is intercepted half a million miles beyond Antares orbit by gigantic beams which fuse them into place. They encounter with laser fire, high-protein beam and subfaractitural nucleonics. Closing in on the Antares patrol craft, the Earthers remit to an older and craftier tradition to defeat the enemy with knives and guns in hand to hand combat. The aliens who are

(Continued on page 82)

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JACK C. HALDEMAN II

Jay Haldeman is back—with a light-hearted look at The World of Tomorrow which should please those who found his "What I Did On My Summer Vacation" (July) too 'experimental' for their tastes, while delighting those who enjoyed its flashes of surreal humor . . .

CHANG BHANG

Illustrated by PANEBAKER

In several isolated corners of the universe, the Bhangs live out their lifetimes with such ponderous slowness that a single act of copulation often lasts more than a century.

On the other hand, there are beings whose lifespans flit in and out in a single laser pulse. They are the blurs on the tapestry of time.

Man is somewhere in the middle, the arithemetic mean, the average. Born of an average star on a average planet, it seems that we are destined to be the norm against which everything else is measured.

It wasn't always that way. Once we thought that we were the center of everything. But that all ended, as the history cubes tell us, about 200 years ago with the Anderson expedition in '47. The year of the contact. The year mankind discovered it was only one of some 75,000 intelligent races. A small drop in a very large bucket, and the bucket gets larger every year.

I've heard about all the rejoicing back on Earth after the initial shock wore off. Everyone talked about how we would benefit from all that advanced knowledge. Has man always been so naive?

All that advanced knowledge had an advanced price tag. Nobody wanted to give anything away for free and we didn't have much that anyone else wanted. You just can't turn a third rate carbo-oxy planet into anything unique. Not when there are thousands of others just like it. Saturn, on the other hand, turned out to be a modestly successful tourist trap for those who lived in our neck of the woods and couldn't afford to travel all the way to B'hrung to see the triple ring cluster. We've made a fair bit of change off that.

My family, for instance, can

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trace whatever wealth it has to a distant ancestor who made her pile rolling tourists on Titan. A few careful investments in pleasure stations and we had assured ourselves some degree of financial freedom. Not that we're all that rich by outworld standards. How can you measure us against someone who owns so many worlds he can't keep track of them? I guess man was destined to be the small change of the universe.

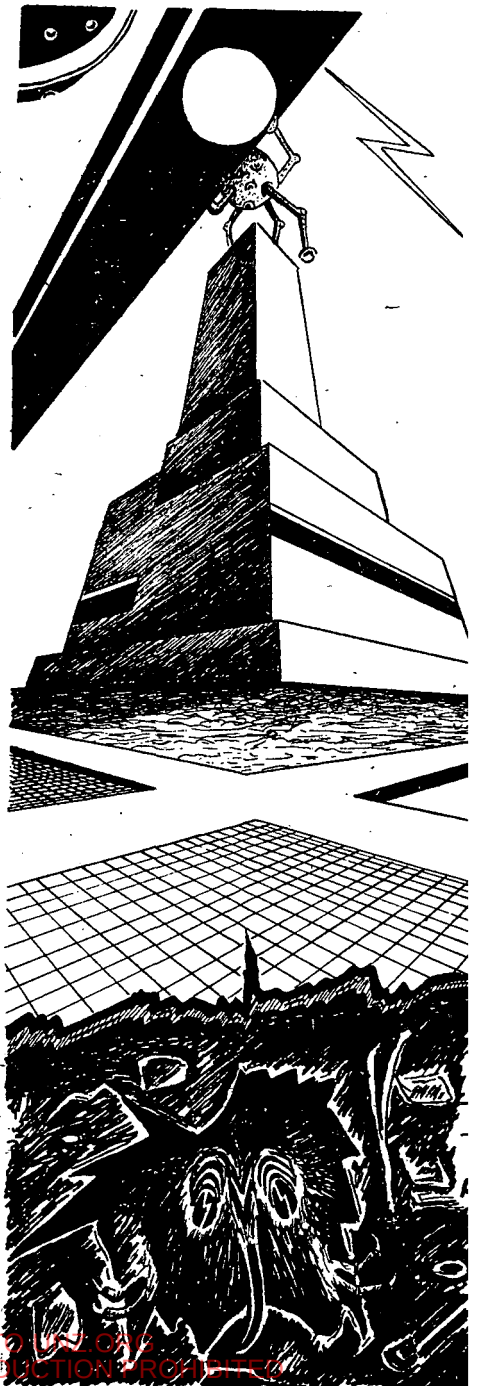
But I really shouldn't complain. I don't have to work and I can afford to travel as much as I want.

Traveling these days is quite an experience if you have the money. If you don't have a lot of cash, it's just as tiring as ever. I always travel first class.

The ship I came over on was fairly typical. Bulky and awkward in its modular construction, it looked more like a spider with warts than anything else. But it wasn't built to win beauty contests, just rip holes through space.

The modular design allows them to plug in cubicles that have been tailor made for different species. Therefore I enjoyed 8/10g all the way, this being the gravity of my home-world. They also balance the atmosphere to your home planet's specs. Better even; no pollution.

They wine you and dine you. You can mingle with anyone who shares a breathable atmosphere, if you can stand his/her particular body odors. Vid-screens are available with instant translation. Money has its advantages. They pack them in



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like veld worms in the economy section.

It was a long trip, almost three weeks, but well worth it. Everybody ought to get to K'halar once in their life, and I was determined to make it while I was still young.

I don't know how to begin describing K'lang, the major, and only, city-state on the planet. Suffice it to say that K'lang is as near to being the hub of the universe as you can get.

It's a pretty confusing city. Buildings often change shape and function as you watch them. Some parts of the city seem almost as unsteady as rapidly moving piles of jello. I suppose that if you are not too far phylogeneticaly removed from jello yourself, it's not too bad. But I haven't gotten up the nerve to go in those sections yet. I'm afraid that I'll sink through the sidewalks.

There are few restrictions at all on K'lang. Just the omni-present one that you must pay for everything you want. Maybe it's money that is the true hub of the universe and everything actually revolves around the gal-creds in my tunic.

There is so much to do here that it would be no problem at all to spend a lifetime just playing the tourist role. Matter of fact, the relativity of life spans being what it is, some beings pass through several generations while on a brief stay.

Once a n'er-do-well colony of Rhunies decided to settle down in a corner of the city. They had gone through several fission cycles before anyone noticed—they are pretty small, you know. It wouldn't have bothered anybody, but they stole a lot of small stuff (what else?) and by and large didn't contribute anything. By the time they were discovered, they had grown to such numbers that the local equivalent of what we would call exterminators had to be brought into the case. Rumor has it that there are still a few hanging around in the dark corners, quietly fissioning.

You can get anything you want here, just like the legendary Alice's Restaurant that once orbited sinfully around Neptune. But magnify that ten-fold, a hundred-fold, hell—raise it to the thousandth power and you still won't come close. Things change so rapidly around here that it may take years for the word of a special attraction to get around the city, much less off world.

But some of the city never seems to change. There is a section arranged much like the old fashioned streets of Megayork on Earth. It was modeled after a time period when life on Earth moved at a much slower pace; late 20th century, I would imagine. I walked through it the other day and was bored to death. The predominance of slug-shaped vendors made me slightly uneasy.

But it's not the flesh pots that brought me to K'lang on K'halar; I've been through all that on a hundred different worlds. How much of this can a person take before he becomes jaded? Even the dubious thrill of stepping into the

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persona of a Blug about to be molested by her father's sister-in-law's third cousin twice removed (the most horrible type of incest and the only sexual taboo among the unimaginative Blugs) begins to pall after awhile.

What really dragged me three quarters of the way across the universe was the market place. *The* market place of the entire known universe. Everything is here, and for usually astronomical prices anything can be purchased.

Taking up fully one third of K'lang, the market is a good 500 square miles of closely packed stalls. You look, touch, smell, haggle and try to buy. The pattern never changes.

I spend a lot of time just wandering around in there. It's pretty confusing at first, a constant clatter of colors and sounds incessently batter your senses. After you learn the trick of blocking out most of the extraneous noise, it gets a lot easier.

Some of the stalls actually look like stalls, others run the gamut from what seem to be fishbowls full of vile-looking creatures to floating air bubbles containing scurrying little things. All selling, all buying. Or at least trying to.

I've bought a few small trinkets since landing. Not too many though, as my funds are somewhat less than adequate for full scale shopping. Mostly I just wander around and stare in what passes for store windows.

The other day I was just kicking around the old cobblestones, which at that particular place happened to be more like crabs then any kind of cobblestone I'd ever seen. I was doing the usual tourist bit, when I wandered into a quiet zone.

Quiet zones are pretty rare as it takes a lot of money to run a full-time mute. It's a good indication that there's something very expensive around. There was only one store in the area.

"Time Slices" read the sign over what I supposed was the doorway. The sign was actually a broad spectrum standardized code which my prelanding hypno-conditioning automatically translated into my home language.

A smaller poster on the side of the building read, "A Piece of the Action For the Discriminating Collector". I had a little difficulty reading it as the walls of the building were changing color and shape pretty rapidly. I was curious, so I entered before the doorway disappeared.

Inside I was greeted by what I took to be the proprietor. You have to be pretty careful on K'halar. I once had an extended, and pretty much one way, conversation with a fire hydrant. But there was no question that this was the person in charge. He was sitting in front of the cash register.

To be truthful, he wasn't really sitting. I recognised him as a Krang and they have a great deal of difficulty actually sitting. Mostly they float in large transparent balls, as this one was, looking for all the world like a bowl half full of

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spaghetti and meat sauce. A couple dozen eyes floated back and forth in seemingly random pattens. He acknowledged my entrance by raising several adjacent strands of spaghetti and waving them in a complicated pattern I took to be some sort of a greeting.

Not having any spaghetti to wave back myself, and not wishing to offend a Krang, I fell back on the standard greeting used on K'halar to cover situations such as this.

"Greeting, most worthy keeper of the shop. I bring through your noble door an interest in your excellent wares along with best wishes for your long life and the success of your offspring (may they keep you well in your old age)". It's a long greeting and certain fast-lived beings have been known to die of old age while slow-speaking creatures are saying it.

I was pretty dissappointed when the translator converted it into Krangese and it was condensed into a monotone burp of less than one second duration. Several of his eyes rotated to the side facing me. Some spaghetti folded back, revealing something which looked like a meatball. It vibrated, emmiting a burp.

"Oh most unworthy one, how can I possibly help you?" came the translation.

I was taken aback. Where was the usual sales pitch?

"I am curious of your goods. I am inquiring of them," I replied.

The translator first sent back a laugh as the meatball vibrated. It came out as tinny and unconvincing as always. Anyway, humor was expressed.

"Unless I am mistaken, you are a Humankind. No Humankind has ever come near to amassing the sum of money necessary for a time slice. In fact, the total wealth of all Humankind is not sufficient for me to set one aside on our lay-away plan. The average price, per millisecond slice, is 1×10^{23} megacreds. I laugh."

I gasped. I swallowed my gum. The total net worth of my home planet is around one megacred. My own chunk is a lot smaller. It boggled the mind.

"I perceive by your speechless condition," he continued, "that you have not been previously aware of our product." The ball started to roll around the room and he sloshed around inside.

I looked around and tried to get an idea what he could have here that cost so much. But the room was bare, save for his tank, the cash register, and a standard catalog view-screen.

"What I have to sell is quite valuable. The price is justified by the product. I sell time, and time does not come cheap." He rolled against the catalog consol and it rocked back and forth.

"Time? I'm afraid I don't—"

"I am quite sure you don't," he interupted, contents awash inside the ball. "It is a difficult concept. Most beings do not have a very clear idea of the true nature of time. They build complicated theories

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which do nothing but confuse the issue."

I think he (she? it? they?) either gave birth or defecated in the middle of the sentence as six small glass balls filled with tiny amounts of spaghetti fell out of a temporary opening in his side and quietly rolled across the floor and out the door. I wasn't sure whether I should congratulate him or ignore the event. As he paid no attention to it, I decided not to say anything.

"Well, time, as we all know," I started, "is the measurment—"

"You do *not* know. *We* know. Time is not a measurment, it is a commodity that can be sliced up, packaged and marketed. While it is true that this is done with great difficulty and at great expense, nevertheless it can be done."

I was determined to finish a sentence, so I found a short one.

"No," I said, this being the shortest sentence I could come up with on the spur of the moment.

"Yes," he replied, upstaging me.

"Imagine this," he continued. "A millisecond of time for your very own! Scan the heavens. Look at each tiny world. See the funny people. Find yourself. See what you were doing, or what your great-great grandfather was doing, or what your great-great grandchildren will be doing a century or two from now."

"You mean the future? You can—"

"Don't interrupt," he interrupted, "Not polite."

He was really getting into his sales pitch. The spaghetti swam inside the ball like a jar of nervous worms.

"Sure we can. The future, the past, the present—what's so special about temporal designations? They're all the same. Things happen, are happening, will happen; these are all words with artificial labels. Words for lexicographers and philosophers to play around with. Time is there, from the beginning to the end, sitting like a loaf of bread. We take slices out of it."

"Like a picture?" I asked.

"Aggg. I might as well talk to a fire hydrant. Of course not like a picture or a holograph or even a vidtape or *anything* like that." He was getting excited, rolling around in tight little circles.

"Take right *now*." Three eyeballs collided to emphasise his point. "If you purchased this millisecond you would have in your possession, for your very own, everything that is happening in the universe at this very instant. Us in this room, the city outside, the planet of K'halar frozen in time, the whole star system, all the planets, everything everywhere. You could take the grand view and reflect upon the positions of the cosmos. Or you could look very closely and find the tiniest of details, the smallest of events, the grains of sand or the boulders. There is more in a millisecond than you could experience in a life-time. Hand it down from generation to generation. The perfect gift for the creature who thinks he has everything. Give him

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time. Everything."

Perspiration rolled off the sides of his ball. He was foaming at the meatball.

"But if this is life size—"

"Kid, you ask the dumbest questions."

All his eyes rolled up towards the ceiling. He sighed.

"Mostly we sell segments from the so-called past. Nostalgia seems to be big these years. Normally we charge more for chunks of the future simply because they're more valuable. You can make a lot of money if you know what's going to happen. But it doesn't cost us any more to slice up the future than the past. It's all the same, you see. You do see, don't you?"

"Well actually—"

"And that's not all, not by a long shot. There are beings in this universe that have the ability to purchase more than a single millisecond of time. Can you imagine that?"

"No," I shouted, anxious to complete another sentence.

"They are usually of a long-lived race. It takes a very long time to scrape together that much money. You would think that whole planets or star clusters would pool their money for time slices, but no—it is always individuals who purchase the large lots. Whole planets can never decide which segments to buy; they never reach agreement. Even the clone races are not of single enough mind when it comes to making decisions involving this much money. It is always an individual. A very rich one."

"There can't be very many that rich," I said, "Why, it would take—"

"It would take 1×10^{26} megacreds to purchase a full second. A little less, actually. We have a quantity discount plan."

"A full second? How—"

"There is only one person who is close to having a full second. He has been purchasing it in consecutive millisecond units for something like the last 5,000 years. Only one more millisecond to go and he will have the whole second. You are indeed fortunate, for he is coming to purchase the last slice now. He has been entering the door for the last five minutes."

I turned around and noticed, for the first time, that a Bhang was coming in. They move so slow they look like statues. I could just barely perceive motion, which meant that he was in an unnatural hurry.

He looked like every other Bhang I'd ever seen, somewhat reptilian, green with overlapping scales. But his tongue. Wow, I'd never seen one so big—hanging nearly to his waist. He wore a top hat, wire rimmed glasses and carried a cane, as most Bhangs do.

I didn't want to miss the purchase, so I walked out, went to a movie, had a hamburger and coke, and came back. He was halfway through the door by then so I took a short tour of the southern hemisphere and wondered all the time what he could possibly want with a second of time.

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By the time I returned, the transaction was nearly complete.

"Will this be cash or charge?" asked the Krang of the Bhang.

"Charge, please," said the Bhang. For such slow moving creatures, they talk pretty fast. I could see that he was extending his thumb for a credit check.

"Your credit has been well established through the years. We may skip the usual formalities. I am sure that you are anxious to complete your purchase. Once more, I must congratulate you on such a fine choice. A very interesting second it is, one of our very best."

"Excuse me," I could not contain my curiousity any longer.

"Yes?" A lizard eyeball rolled in my direction, though the head moved very slowly.

"I was, well, I was wondering as to what use you were going to put this second of time."

"Would you care to observe?" He was showing definite movement and I knew he was terribly excited. I feared for his heart under such rapid movements.

"It would be a great honor," I replied.

"Well, I suppose I owe it to the shopkeeper who has undoubtably witheld his curiousity for a good many years. If you wish to remain, feel free."

"You mean—?" asked the shopkeeper.

"Yes. Make the preparations."

The Krang rolled rapidly around the room bumping hidden buttons I hadn't noticed before. The walls fell away and there was total darkness.

"Here are the previous milliseconds," came the Kreng's disembodied voice as a million worlds sprang into existance.

They were all solid, real, frozen, still—with a substance that I intuitively knew could not be faked. The milliseconds were not lined up exactly and there was a lot of overlap.

"And here is the last one," the Krang said as a nearly identical universe came exploding out of a pinpoint of very intense light and settled down among the others.

The Bhang extended a god-like hand and nudged the overlapping universes until they were perfectly aligned. He then removed a shiny object from his coat pocket. A stapler!

With a flourish, he reached up and placed a single chrome staple in the upper left hand corner of the universe.

He then grabbed the universe at the bottom edge, lifted it up and let the millisecond slices fall rapidly upon one another.

For a second, a full second, the cosmos danced, worlds swung in their orbits, people everywhere moved with a jerk.

The Bhang was so excited, he jumped in the air.

It took him three days.

—JACK C. HALDEMAN II

ON SALE NOW IN OCTOBER AMAZING

THE BEGINNING OF JOHN BRUNNER'S BRILLIANT NEW NOVEL-THE STONE THAT NEVER CAME DOWN. CHANG BHANG

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While Bill Rotsler's stories have appeared with increasing frequency in the pages of our sister magazine, AMAZING SF *(his most recent: "The Gods of Zar," Oct., 1973), the story which follows marks his debut here—three thousand words through which are densely woven the threads of many confrontations in the—*

WAR OF THE MAGICIANS

WILLIAM ROTSLER

Illustrated by JEFF JONES

THE BLACKNESS SWIRLED and split and he was into the battle before he realized it. A flight of scaled, screaming harpies was launched into the smoky skies, arching away to drop out of sight over the dark hill. A troop of knights in black armor thundered to the top of the hill and Ryan could hear guttural commands before they wheeled their great chargers to clatter by.

Ryan threw himself behind something large and scaly, his fingers clenched around great plates of horn. The knights rode by, lit red by the flames of a burning castle, imperious and bold. Ryan stared at one, a headless figure with melted slag on his shoulders, erect and confident.

He turned and stumbled into the darkness. *I'm mad!*

Ryan tripped, sprawling forward into the rocky ground. He glanced back as he clambered to his feet and was stopped dead. The flames from the hilltop flickered over a horse and naked rider flung into the dirt.

Then Ryan realized it was a centaur, bloodied and gutted. He lurched away, sickened, and made his way around the shoulder of the hill.

Crouching behind a rock painted with symbols, Ryan looked up at the unburnt position of the castle. Here some ancient catastrophe had brought down walls and parts of towers. Frightened apprentices in black robes smeared with spilled liquid and fallen dust hurried up and down curving stairs, their arms filled with parchments and stoppered vials.

There was a scream and a ogre lumbered around a stone wall, three times the height of a man, clad in furs and leather straps and wielding

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a club rudely cut from a tree trunk. Growling, he smashed a trio of robed figures back against the wall, blood spurting and vials exploding in colors.

At the top of the ruined monument a figure appeared, black clad and white skinned. A clawlike hand shot into the sky and strange words burst forth. Below, the ogre plucked a figure from the steps and hurled him at a squad of pikemen that had come clattering around the curve of wall.

The warlock atop the tower screamed one last spell and the sky split with lightning. Naked witches were pale smears in the night, lit by the lightning and tinted by the flames.

The ogre toppled under the pikes, slowed into sluggish movement by the shouted spell. A witch swooped low, dropping a rock and crushing a leathery pikeman.

Ryan stared around him wildly. *I'm mad! I'm dreaming!* But the pain of bruised knees and palms told him differently.

A legion of dragons charged the towers and the lightning struck and they toppled, kicking and whipping their great scaly tails. They lay twisting while heroic shields were raised, bloodied and downed. Enchanted swords sang in air thick with smoke and stench and flying arrows. The dragons lurched to their feet, restored to life from afar, and sent off in another direction, spreading green-scaled death.

A knight rode up the hill, almost trampling Ryan. A giant on a white

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steed, slashing about with a jeweled sword, scattering pikemen and making wild cries in a strange tongue. The sky was slashed with brilliance and he clutched at his chest with an embroidered glove, falling backwards into a swarm of dwarves in scarlet.

Ryan ran down the hill and into blackness, falling in with bloodied soldiers in retreat. The sky purpled, then bloodied in great sweeping flashes.

"He misread the incantation again," grumbled a pikeman, squinting at the sky.

"What's going on?" demanded Ryan, clutching at his sleeve.

"It's not going well," the soldier said, then hurled himself into the shelter of some rocks. A night-marish figure plunged from the sky, all claws and leathery black wings, and lay fluttering until it died within a ring of cabalistic chalk marks on the rocks.

Ryan blundered through some thick brush to escape a charge of centaurs, screaming their strange war cries and waving clubs. The moans of the wounded were everywhere.

Ryan broke through into a clearing, gasping for breath, staring as a ring of hooded figures sacrificed a bewildered virgin. The knife rose and fell, then rose again, bloodied and dripping rose petals from her writhing body.

Sickened Ryan broke through their circle, knocking several down and as their cowls fell back he saw skull-like faces and jeweled eyes. The girl was dead and Ryan lurched away.

A sobbing angel with a broken wing limped past as Ryan stood gasping at the edge of a road. A son of the Minotaur stumbled and fell, unbloodied and untouched and already going rigid with death.

On a nearby hilltop, lit by torches held by oiled brown bodies, a pagan empress permitted a plumed knight to kiss her hem. He mounted a fiery black stallion and rode away. The empress turned to confer with a bearded general and a cowled scarecrow figure when the horse returned, its reins trailing and the high saddle bloodied.

The sky brightened and there were distant screams. Ryan followed the pointing fingers of the empress to see a rain of molten gold falling near the castle, turning men into writhing statues.

There were more screams and the shrill bellow of dragons as the rain swept forward . . .

"Wake up, Ryan!"

Helmeted soldiers raised a forest of swords . . .

"*Ryan!* Please, Ryan!"

"No! Fall back to the Temple!"

"Ryan! Wake, up, Ryan!"

"What?" He was somewhere else, bathed in sweat, and a woman bent over him. *Gloria.* The sounds of battle died away. "Oh . . . I had another dream?"

"A beaut." She sat back on the edge of the bed and smiled, patting his arm. The bedstand lamp was on. The night was quiet and cool. He could hear the faint rumble of traf-

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fic. "Want to tell me about it?" she asked softly.

"It . . . it was the War again. The . . . the magic war, the War of the Magicians."

"Bad?" Her eyes were kind, concerned.

"The worst yet. It's mad . . . but . . . but I think it's the last big battle. Oh . . . it's so *real!* They overran us—! There was this rain of gold, falling like—!

She grabbed Ryan and hugged him tightly to her bosom. "Take it easy, honey," she said, stroking his hair and patting his shoulders. "Easy, darling, it's only—"

"Only a dream? I . . . I don't think so. I don't know what it is. It's too *real.* Oh, I know, it's *magic* and there are knights and sorcerers . . . but it's real!" Ryan pulled her closer. "It's more real than Nam! It's more real than Da Nang and I was hit at Da Nang!"

Gloria made soothing sounds and held him close.

"What's happening to me, honey? Am I going mad? Night after night . . . closer and—"

"Hush, darling. They're just dreams . . ."

"No, that's where you're wrong." Ryan pressed her back and looked into her eyes. "You don't believe that and neither do I. It may just be happening inside my head . . . and maybe it's happening . . . somewhere . . . some . . . when."

He pulled back and breathed deeply. "Every night, every dream gets me farther into the War . . . but a different kind of war. Last week it was just vague sounds and blackness. Then it was something happening over the hill. Tonight . . . . I couldn't sleep now. I don't dare sleep."

Ryan looked at the clock, then out the window. It was lighter. Dawn was not far off. The Night on Bare Mountain was over. It was eighteen, nineteen hours to sleeptime again. H-hour minus nineteen.

Ryan turned his back on the battlefield and went into the bathroom.

DR. EASTON WAS KIND and listened with a straight face. He gave Ryan some pills and some easy, rehearsed advice about getting rest, not working so hard, tension, and so forth.

H-hour minus ten.

Gloria poured chilled red wine into a glass and smiled across the candlelight and tried talk, food, romance and sex to distract him. Ryan doubled the good doctor's suggested dosage, then fought it at the last slipping moments . . .

Ryan rolled over and came up fast, holding up his shield. Steel rained on his battered symbol as he thrust and slashed at the night-marish figures. A snarling werewolf platoon leaped past him with bared fangs and Ryan pulled his bloodied sword from a winged monster and stood leaning on the sword, gasping for breath.

"Oh, god," he said aloud, *I'm back in it!*

Ryan looked towards the shattered tower where the battalion

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commanders hunched over smoky mirrors and bubbling pots. He started walking towards it.

A badly-constructed man-thing scrambled onto the steps ahead of Ryan and he cut at it with impatient savagry. Nearly headless it fell towards him, and hung with dirty stiffening fingers on the shield, looking into Ryan's face with dead eyes. Ryan shouldered it aside and it fell with a crash unheard in the screaming din.

The stairs curved around the tower, littered with shards of discarded armor and scraps of charred parchment. A hairy soldier in leather armor gave Ryan a sullen salute and the thick oak door swung open.

The headquarters was red-lit by cauldron fires and milky reflections from battle mirrors. A white-skinned, hawk-nosed magician jerked his hooded head at Ryan.

"Well?" he snorted impatiently, his fingers shredding a dried toad.

"Let me out!" Ryan shouted.

"*What?* Cowardice! Desertion!" He raised an arm and pointed long bony fingers at the intruder.

"No!" shouted Ryan, swinging his sword wide. "For God's sake, wake me up! Let me out of this!"

A nearby wizard cursed and threw Ryan a frightening glance. Red smoke imploded into a hollowed skull and the magician raged. "See what you've done? You've upset the incantations with your incautious curses! Out! Go! Back to the battle!"

Ryan took another step into the room, his face pleading. "In the name of all that's holy, *let me out!*"

Two hooded heads snapped up and there was a cursing that was not the formal, chanting cursing of the spell-makers.

"*Out!*" screamed the wizard. Ryan staggered back and out the door. The guard leaned back against the wall, clutching a wrist that was handless. The steps curved downward and away into battle. Ryan went past him, his mind groggy and his guts hurting.

A witch fell and slammed against the stone, her naked body bloody and burnt. A fire on the far side of a sawtoothed hill silhouetted rearing stallions and battling warriors.

Ryan ran down the steps, bloody sword before him. *I must get away! Run! Hide! I am just a mortal!*

The enameled shells of a company of centurions forced Ryan to turn towards a depression where goblins clawed and tore at something. Beyond them naked Valkyries fought cloaked Nubians with fiery valor.

A brace of elementals rose before Ryan. Fear and panic rose as he realized his sword was useless against their ethereal danger. *They want to devour me . . . bit by bit . . . wholly . . . all . . .*

"Ryan! Please, Ryan—!"

He ran. Leaping a fallen column he splashed through puddles of water, stained with sworls of blood and reflecting the skies. A centaur, thrashing in his death throes, kicked Ryan into a rotting dragon not yet dead. He struggled free and ran on.

Ryan fell against a knight turned

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to stone and panted with a heaving chest. His sword was gone. His armor was dragging him to the ground, to rest, to the grave. He lurched on, running, fleeing.

A trumpeting dragon crashed over the ridge, its flailing claws shattering and tumbling the frozen company of knights. Stone arms and stone heads rolled and broke again. Another great flame-mouthed beast, ridden by a laughing madman amid the spines, came over the crest and the two monsters fought across the stubby forest of granite soldiers.

They were gone, suddenly, kicking clods of dirt and flesh. Ryan was alone, hanging limply over a wounded statue. Blood oozed from a broken granite limb by his face. The sounds of battle moved away and after a long moment Ryan raised his head.

At the head of his granite warriors a crested knight stood bravely, an unchanged sword held upright by the blade. The sword was a thousand miles away, but Ryan commanded his tired muscles to move, cursing them into action.

Then he was holding the hilt and looking into the sculptured eyes of a marble king. He tugged and strained to get the sword away. He stopped as he heard the sounds of battle coming again, then renewed his efforts with savage fury.

Slowly the sword came from the marble hands and blood dripped from between the fingers. Then it was free and alive in Ryan's hand and he hacked at the air with it gleefully. The face of the statue altered but Ryan was already leaping away, strength flowing into his body.

From the ridge Ryan saw demons cavorting on the fallen bodies. Ghouls were carrying their naked booty to humid lairs. Satyrs were at their work on flesh still warm. Dragons feasted. An empress was stripped by firelight. Something howled and something growled and something moaned.

Ryan raised his sword and cried the name of his God.

Pale and sweaty faces turned towards him. Swords hissed from scabbards. Hydra-heads turned. Animal eyes glared through armored visors. They stirred. They moved.

"Ryan... Ryan... please..."

Silently they came on.

"Darling... ?"

The only sounds were the crackle of flames and the scrape of steel and claws. Ryan thrust the sword up into the night and shouted a Name.

Hard muscles bunched for the charge. Saliva gleamed on fangs and teeth. Eyes glittered.

"Ryan, for God's sake—wake up!"

With a sudden surge of throat-ripping cries they came and Ryan took the sword with both hands and shouted a defiant curse.

"Ryan, wake up! Ryan? Ryan? *Ryan, where are you?*"

But there was no turning back, now.

—WILLIAM ROTSLER

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He lived two lives—one a failure and the other an overwhelming success—for he had found that it was just—

A MATTER OF TIME

JIM ROSS

Illustrated by GRAY MORROW

THIEF? MURDERER? Call me what you will. No court will convict me. No court can. In answer to your question, no, I'm not in hiding, most certainly not. I am proof that there are crimes so subtle—and yet so blatant, really—as to escape detection forever. They escape sight and elude the ear. In fact, they mock the senses altogether; they are seen, tasted, touched, and none of these. They throw shadows in history. Such a crime was mine.

This document will be found among my other papers; you know my name, of course, and know very well that it stands among the great names of our time. In reality, however, my stature is the measure of my crime. This is of course hidden from those who so enthusiastically acclaim me, and oh yes, I am certainly acclaimed—with good cause too, I might add (without accompanying modesty) and I'm sure you'll hasten to agree. I've known wealth, fame, glory (emphasis I leave to the last). I am studied in the universities. There are many, many volumes in print concerning various aspects of my achievement, and daily I receive invitations to lecture on every continent. I refuse, of course, as I refuse all such invitations, as I've refused for many years.

But to sum up with a cliche, time has served only to enhance my reputation. I can only smile when it is said in my presence, for it is more true than anyone imagines.

I WAS BORN in a small northwestern town during the last century—1956, to be precise, on September 11. My father was part-owner of a grocery store; my mother died before my twelfth year (one of the few remaining analysts of Freudian orientation made much of this in the nineties, apparently seeing in it the seeding ground of my future creativity). As has been noted by contemporaries, aspiring

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biographers etc., I was almost flawlessly unexceptional as a child; this of course signifies nothing, as I somewhat defensively point out. Yet how am I to explain my adolescence, which was devoid of any of those signs and symptoms which might have indicated some kind of embryonic ability struggling to achieve the reality of form? I was apparently of slightly above average intelligence. I was of average height and weight. Everything about me bespoke the mean. But fortunately enough I can always point out my last two years or so of school, for it was then that my interest in things—latent interest, it is referred to in biographies—surfaced abruptly. And after graduation I was lucky enough to be accepted at Armstrong College in New York City to continue my studies.

Ah. And what was I to be? A writer, dear friends, a writer. I decided that—or was it decided for me, who can say?—in my first year of college. My roomate (reduced to a mere footnote in my biographies) was an aesthete of twenty-five, a poet who wrote by pale candlelight at night (passe even then), flaunting a distaste for corporations, politics and ideology by day, laughing at those earnest souls with their intense eyes and quick movements, the kind who pamphleteered and protested, dying to die on the barricades for Justice, Peace etc. He thought them vulgar; not so strangely I thought so too after a while. The term had an undeniably

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aristocratic appeal, and one is impressionable at eighteen. I remember Jonathon remarking one day that he preferred the civilized decadence of the 19th century to the hysterical ugliness of our own. There he may have had something. In any case I joined a literary club he had formed. I became interested in the novel, plays and poetry. The nineteenth century was back in fashion; I composed sonnets and wrote epigrams which he indulgently praised. Those few years were the high noon of life; the century before was our literary lunch. That was in the mid-seventies; what a foolish child was I.

Foolish because I lacked talent, and didn't see that fatal fact. All that I had to claim as talent was the undisciplined energy of youth, which I mistook innocently enough for genius (oh yes, I said and say *mistook*; I was utterly devoid of talent, believe it or not as you will). I was more than overgenerous with myself in those days, and so were the others I expect: youth's happy ignorance, and on it went regardless. We discussed it all, style, diction, imagery, metaphor, we discussed Robbe-Grillet, Borges, Updike and Nabokov. We ranged the literary spectrum and thought longingly of the colours in which one day we ourselves would appear. It is only in retrospect that we add the bitter to the sweet. Life seemed enjoyable enough then—though our self-deception was more than a little amusing. Offhand I can't think of anyone I knew who achieved any measure of fame. Myself excluded, of course; but then I'm another story altogether, as you will shortly discover.

I was determined to be an outstanding success; when others of my age took the first few faltering steps to fame, it gave rise on my part to a tolerant chuckle. What were they as compared to what I would be? Their fate confirmed it. Only a few established firmer reputations. More often they fell into the dimness of polite obscurity; they published a novel here and a volume of poetry there; were received politely and were politely ignored. With an offhand arrogance I laughed and knew that little else could be expected of mere mortals such as they; but a God now, what was the future of a God? My breath caught in my throat. I dreamed. All very well, but life at last pierced through to present its dark and unfortunately valid credentials. I was twenty-one and was shortly to graduate with a B.A. in Honours English; I was suddenly forced to consider the more immediate aspects of existence. There was a question of livelihood. What was I to do? I glanced away from my crystal ball and realized with some amusement that I hadn't bothered to consider the tedious and totally unglamorous present—which, however, was considering me.

Become a teacher? No. A tiresome task. I took the first job I could find and became an assistant to the assistant librarian in the fic-

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tion section of the library at Armstrong College. What matter that the work was dull. All that mattered was the future and my talent. The present was entirely inconsequential. But as I catalogued books and roamed through the stacks of the library, it amused me to conjure up that someone who in this very library would one day be handling or cataloguing or withdrawing *my* books, the books that existed in Platonic perfection somewhere in the years ahead. It was only a matter of time. Wasn't I already engaged in the first draft of an ambitious work? Smiling a little I recognized the utter banality of the project, for it was a novel of adolescence, and standard fare from first novelists—but I was certain that I could bring more to the topic than had been brought to it previously. My friends agreed. What a fool I was. (No doubt you're saying a senile fool if you've happened to read any of my biographies. There was no mention of the unfortunate fact that I was an assistant in a library? But I was, dear reader; I was. In fact. And unknown to anyone now, most definitely unknown.)

How strange words are, their simplicity divorced from the emotion that marries them in mind. My novel was refused. Even now I moan in pain, and what meaning can that possibly have for someone else? Seven times, I submitted my novel, seven times; seven times refused, and refused without comment or criticism. Like some creature cast from its ocean deep on barren sands, humiliated beneath pale suns, I writhed. I was broken. I did not know what I had done wrong; I did not known why they had passed me by. So in a state of ghastly depression I took my novel to Jonathon and left it with him overnight; I confess that I expected extravagant praise, and returned eagerly the following afternoon. He smiled as I entered and said, "Oh, it was marvellous, a marvellous joke. I couldn't have done any better myself. It's a marvellous parody." Then looking at me more closely, he said, "It was a joke, wasn't it?" He laughed as if I'd already admitted as much. His laughter drained me; I turned quite pale. My novel was intended as neither joke nor parody. After a few moments I reached out a hand for my manuscript and quietly left the room. I walked out onto the street, his laughter echoing in my soul. I hated Jonathon. They were such fools to laugh at me. The tables would turn and one day I would laugh at them. They would burn like vapours under the sun of my perfect genius. It was only a matter of time.

I went back to my writing without a moment's hesitation or doubt—writing like a fanatic, which by that time I probably was. I wrote until very late, three in the morning, I woke up at seven, went to work at nine, and spent hours in that ghastly library among the volumes of books, the living and the dead, the famous and stillborn—

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hating, hating every moment. Each book mocked me in its certainty of existence, cooly arrogant cover, pale pages. It was too much for me to bear. On one overcast day I walked from the library; the rain began to fall; I was never to return.

In the same grey limbo as the rain, in the halflight between day and night, I wrote, despaired, and wrote again. I blush to think of it now, but I saw myself as carrying the cross of the world's stupidity, a conceit I'm sure you'll find even less tolerable than I. But it was a difficult time and I was young. I even thought of suicide but to my credit rejected the notion as excessively melodramatic. Surely there were other less . . . . costly, alternatives. There were. There always are, and after a while I took a position as an assistant computer librarian in Armstrong's Physics department, in the final analysis as dull a job as my first. With several others I made certain that all the recommended volumes of any relevant subject were assimilated into a central computer and relayed to yet other computers in the Pentagon and universities across the continent—in Chicago, Montreal, San Francisco etc., not to mention two or three sub-oceanic cities on the eastern seaboard. It may sound glamorous and important; things often do when reduced to their essentials. But to me it was neither, and I ignored everyone around me. I wrote in my spare time and kept up with the latest books. Yes, and I laughed at their flaws, the incompetance revealed in their 300-odd pages; but still it was with an initial detachment that I meandered through the literary landscape, amusedly poking at the corpses in the undergrowth (mere fertilizer for the colossus to come); but detachment was followed by envy (better a corpse than an unpublished corpse), envy by anger (my second novel was refused in the same manner, the same callous indifference as the first). Of a sudden it came to me that I was finished. I had not a chance in the world of succeeding. I was through.

Through. A weight of sorrow, a cloudy day—and spring; I lifted my eyes to the pale flesh of the sun, and spring it did not seem at all. Everything was autumn. I drifted in constant pain. With a certain supply of self-mocking bitterness I continued to read the literary quarterlies. I thought of the books which would never be blessed by their pages. I thought of my pain: you're through. You're through—I was young, yet knew I would never write again.

You who are reading this probably know something of my life as it is publicized, and if that is the case your incredulity is understandable. I shan't discuss the next twenty years, there's no point to it. I was married and divorced. I kept to my job. There's nothing much to say. But it was in my early forties that I first began hearing of Lionel Hayden.

He was twenty-two; he had published a first novel, an ironic fantasy by the name of . . . . but let that slide by. You will have

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guessed with a little luck. The book, however, the book sold scarcely three thousand copies—a monstrous oversight on the part of the public that served to endear him to the little literary critics and their odd reverse snobbery. But it was not merely this which endeared him (give credit where credit is due); Hayden's was a prose style the envy of any writer; his imagery was incomparably beautiful and was to grow more so in later years. He published a second novel, a third; he took his place in the literature of the world. He became a commercial success. And at last add this to his list of assets; his was an attractive appearance. He lacked arrogance, was attractively shy. He won many hearts.

He did not win mine, dear reader. He had published at 22, and oh, I might once have published at 22. But I was 44, and with my youth I had shed my vision of greatness and of fame. How I hated Lionel Hayden! Why not admit it? He was a colossus, and I hated him. For there he was—22, 25, 28—and with each new work, glory; and there was I, attendant to computers—45, 50, 55—drifting into darkness, unknown. Then oddly enough (was it really so odd? Can any two meaningful events arbitrarily coincide with such mathematical precision?) Hayden published his most beautiful novel, a book universally acclaimed as the first great art work in the 21st century, and on that day I fastened on the trail of my monstrous crime. I was just short of sixty; he was thirty-seven. Shortly we were to be bound closer in history than any two individuals before then or since.

It was a dirty day in December; the light gave way to the drifting snow, and I had a cold, yet was forced to stay overtime to catch up on some long overdue work, work which was as nothing to the coldness and the cars and the skies and the skyscrapers and the laggard and the lost. There was Hayden's brilliant new novel, a cold and flawless work gaining accolades right and left—I had as yet to read it, but it would doubtless be equal its praise—no wonder my sadness.

Let me digress a moment and mention what was at the time a recently acquired curiosity of the department, the Random-Association computer (which you will probably remember as an initial step in the creation of an artificial and independant brain. There was much made of it at the time). Linked to the central computer it had available for its use a staggering amount of the world's scientific knowledge and was unique by virtue of its method of cognition—categorized loosely by the press as random association; it drew knowledge from the central computer, integrating concepts and uniting formulae the year round. Its operation was reminiscent of a minuet: streaming light indicating free flow; frozen light as the data was recorded, and then pool of thought in flux again. I might add with a ghostly chuckle that its best

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formulation was one concerning its own future improvement; it was somewhat gratifying to contemplate the notion of computer egotism.

The hour was late; I wasn't getting anything done. Outside the door the guards passed by with persistent regularity, and I sat staring with unfocused eyes at the absurd stack of paper before me. I felt shifting and settling within me an ocean of despair, and despair of such profound debilitating intensity that I was for a moment unable to move. I was a failure, I was nothing more than a pawn on life's chessboard—and that unbearably cheap and stained little image seemed suddenly my epitaph. I moaned; I stared at the hateful blinking computers through the glass wall of my office. There were shadows thrown on the floor by their streaming lights. How unutterably dismal this was. My gaze wandered slowly to the lists of books that still required processing, the endless lists of subject matter: virtually everything, from sub-atomic particles to the latest in laser research to biochemistry to time. Time—I was almost sixty years old—how little was left.

Stunned into lifelessness I folded over my desk, head in hands, listening within myself to a sea of silence. I felt nothing at all; I felt neither sadness nor despair, and when at last I lifted myself, it was with an added indifference that I confronted the list before me: the nature of time. I glanced away—and it was then that I had one of those—I am irresistably drawn to cliches, and with a certain satisfactory bitterness shall not permit myself to forsake this one—'strokes of genius' which was to ensure my immortality and add a new dimension of subtlety and horror to the concept of crime. Rising in excitement I turned to my files, the books castrated into cards, and took a moment to draw out everything related to the subject of time. The computer awaited me, blinking; with accelerating tension I fed them into that giant machine. Lights flickered on; a humming sound pursued its destiny and died. Now for the Random-Association computer. In a moment I had programmed it to pursue one single thought, and as I stood back silently before its pale panels of glowing light, I remember wondering vaguely if time travel were possible after all.

HAVE YOU GUESSED in what direction I am headed? I'll only say that the unified data of mankind's scientific past came up with astonishing results; in two weeks I had in my possession a time-travel device, guaranteed infallible and simple to assemble in three easy lessons. Portable, too. (Damn casual, aren't I? There's nothing like a certain brand of offhandedness). What's more, no scientist today (it's twenty-five years later) would even consider the subject of time travel. They laugh if I ask them, and of course so do I—

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a little more loudly than they, however.

But no doubt you're impatient to know 'what happened next'? Were I unbearably coy I might end my story here and let you guess the rest. But for those lacking minds and imagination I shall say that I had decided my course of action and nothing remained but to carry it through. I was to return to the past and the year of '76. 1976. I was twenty that year; Lionel Hayden wasn't born. The fact was of some importance, and I trust you've already guessed why. But no more verbal fidgets. My journey. What I expected of it I can't say, though it seems logical to assume I was overwhelmingly afraid. Yet its sum was a flash of light, a hollowed feeling and the sudden sense of inversion, of being folded in upon myself. Nothing to it. The year was '76. It was daylight; two in the afternoon. There was grass; there were trees. I was in Central Park, with a suitcase clutched under my arm.

One speaks of 'buying time'. I bought time and spent it that afternoon, wandering. 'To buy time' I thought to myself guiltily; the phrase had acquired new meaning; granted my circumstances it seemed in some way vaguely illicit. Still, how strange, dear reader, how strange. There was I in that dead world of my youth—or rather, a world less dead than embalmed. Anything chancing to touch my senses brushed memory too—the heat, New York's heat at the start of summer, the crowds, the frantic traffic, the sidewalks of New York where I had walked, where I had dreamed. I passed a few melancholy hours before seeking my apartment.

Up a flight of stairs I had walked forty years before. Rather upsetting, for they drew to mind how easily I had climbed them at twenty. I waited a moment at the top to catch my breath; then still dizzy I proceeded down the hall to my suite, 416 (*his* suite rather, that of the youth I had been), and with the certain knowledge that that solid door would give way to incorporeality beneath my hand, and the world shatter and life dissolve, I stood there quietly a while and knocked. I wasn't home (I caught myself thinking it and laughed; but it was true, after all). The door was fortunately open (I was always rather lax about such matters) so I permitted myself entrance (oddly enough I can remember debating the ethics involved) and sat down. Five o'clock before he came home. Scene: a darkened room. Accessories to the fact: shut blinds, drawn curtains. I have groceries in hand. I am nudging the door shut behind me. I myself am rising; he himself is turning. And young. So young. So very young. Textbooks on the bags of groceries. He is turning somewhat languidly. He sees me now, and now such forzen motion. He is paralyzed. His astonishment is compounded: for I see the smoothness of his flesh; and weep; simply weep.

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He asks who I am, what am I doing there; I weep harder. Indecision. He leads me to a chair and sits me down (Muddled. Harmless. That's what he thinks). Who are you? I've mentioned that I was impressionable at twenty; it took an hour or so to convince him.

It was a deluge on my part. I named names, remembered dates. I shed experience like water. I dredged up the most intimate memories. I sauntered carelessly through our childhood, on to adolescence, wandering off on half-remembered paths and by-ways, referring to the fallen seasons, summer (a certain baseball game, never forgotten), fall (car, rear-end collision. Fourteen and hurt, not seriously), winter (any number of things, a strawberry bed, a frozen flowering under the icework of a backyard skating rink. Chipping away the lacquered leaves). To finish him off I mentioned with utmost nonchalance a novel he was planning for the coming year. He had never mentioned it to anyone. So at any rate I convinced him of my authenticity. I gave him time for a smoke and then proceeded to my task. A messy job. I was excessively brutal. Couldn't be helped, couldn't be helped. I told him what lay ahead—the tortured, wasted years; and the disappointments; and the suffering; his shattered dreams and life. Something just short of hatchetwork, in fact. He cried. And may I ask what man would not were his life set in a showcase before him? What lives have any glory? Most are a series of disappointments waterfalling down to the stagnant pool of death. But I revealed the man I had become to the twenty year's youth I was.

The rest is history: my history, literary history, unknown history. I had prepared an effective arguement. God knows it took time to win it. Initially the boy resisted my logic, and continued to resist, and I felt a certain dim admiration for his integrity, if such it was; still, it simply wouldn't do. I cried out finally: "Oh, you fool! You fool! Look what I'm offering you. The world. Anything the world has to offer. Riches. Fame. All the world's beauty. Look at the alternatives. Look at what you'll become. Look at me!"

He looked; he shuddered. I had won.

Without another word I lifted my suitcase, placed it carefully on the table, unlocked it and opened it.

Within lay Lionel Hayden's lifework, his ten novels.

I said, "Here they are."

YES, THAT IS *precisely* what we set about to do. All very well to steal, but to steal a man's future, his talent, his glory. Can you imagine any baser crime than that? Impossible? Most unfortunately not. Hayden wasn't yet born; and by the time he was twenty or so years of age, those beautiful novels of his would already be published. They would be literary history. So much for Hayden! So much for the colossus! Ah, to fox reality, to trifle

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with time! I told the boy he must type each of Hayden's works into manuscript form (after I had made certain necessary revisions pertaining to dates, locations etc.—changes which were astonishingly few, all things considered) and submit them over a period of years to a certain publisher I had in mind. Immoral? Yes. Audacious? Yes. Feasible? Unfortunately, yes. The project was to get underway at once. I was to return to my time—and knowing full well that time flight was at very least a hazardous art and that my future might be so radically altered that I as I knew myself might vanish. A delicate proposition. Had I succeeded? Had I failed? Time, I thought, would tell.

Eventually I returned.

I RECALL ATTENDING a cocktail party in my late sixties, a dreary affair for the most part, and easily forgotten were it not for a trifling incident which carried some emotional weight then and still does now. I was talking with one of our formost literary critics. The conversation was rather forced. I knew he had wanted to meet me, and his remoteness was confusing. We made small talk. But finally he burst out with: when will you publish another novel? I shrugged and smiled. He said, "For God's sake man, write something. You're wasting your time here. Aren't you working?" I shrugged again.

There you have it in a nutshell: the brute and brutal essence. Yes, I succeeded. Yes, I won what I wanted. Yes, yes, yes. But what then: that is the question. What then? I was acclaimed. My name was a synonym for greatness; it is still a synonym for greatness. Yet over the years I have become the most outstanding literary enigma of our time; the reason is in the above. I haven't published since the age of fifty, and there is always that infernal question: "Why aren't you working? You haven't stopped writing, have you?" Stopped writing? Why, I had stopped at five-and-twenty. In another twenty-five I had published Hayden's novels. And twenty-five after that . . . . oh, I was acclaimed as the greatest novelist to bridge our century and the last.

It wasn't that life was unpleasent: on my return it was nothing less than an orgy of pleasure. Materializing, I had inherited forty years of new memory. I had several apartments, many friends; I went to parties and if the fancy struck me holidayed in Europe or Africa. And I tasted the glory of Hayden's greatness. Ah, but dear friends, how demanding is praise, and what a weight when one is unworthy of it. I had my first doubts about what I had done. But in any case what was I to do now? Attempt to match Hayden's novels on my own? Surpass them? Of course not. I am a mediocre man, and have always been a mediocre man. I've had all the time in the world to ponder that judgment. Only Heaven knows what God's will be, if God exists.

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MAINSTREAM SF AND GENRE SF

by GARDNER DOZOIS

The following article is a transcript of Gardner Dozois' Guest of Honor speech at the 1973 Disclave, held in Washington, D.C., over the Memorial Day weekend. No attempt has been made to recast this speech as an article; it exists here in the form which brought its author a standing ovation from convention attendees.—TW

SO HERE WE ALL ARE, sitting in a hall in Washington D.C., attending the Disclave.

Outside, the highways are jammed with traffic, the skies are filled with planes like the 747 that can whiz hundreds of people through the air at 700 m.p.h. and up above them are satelites taking pictures of the weather for the 7 O'clock news. Large segments of the population are suggesting that the president be impeached. Tuna fish is loaded with mercury, soft drinks have cyclimates, and recent reports indicate that Dial Soap rots your brain out at the same time it's getting your hands *really* clean. Disneyworld has risen out of the Everglades, and is reputed to have one of the largest commercial submarine fleets in the world. Marlon Brando has just made the world safe for million-dollar skin flicks. A young lady in this paper offers to give me a lesson in discepline and a massage. A young man urges me to send him a confidential photograph. If I wish, I can dial-a-prayer, or dial Bireut. Within ten blocks of this hotel I could certainly buy any conceivable kind of pharmacutical stew to blow, expand, spindle or mutilate my mind. And right up there, right now, there are three astronauts in orbit, trying to repair their space station.

And yet, we feel that we must come *here* for a science-fiction convention.

So some of us sit here in uncomfortable wooden chairs, and some of us stand up at the podium and make fools of ourselves, and the strange thing is, none of this seems strange to us. It's a truism that a visitor from 1890 would goggle at this mass of folderol that makes up the world of 1973. We often forget that he might well gape at us too. Looking at us from a different viewpoint, we would be just as strange to him as the external World of the Future, because we are a part of that world of course, inescapably meshed with it.

We take things for granted. Most of the time, we are no more emotionally aware of our own millieu than we are aware that the Earth is hurtling through space at 6,000 m.p.h., taking us and this rundown auditorium and the 747's along with it.

And none of this strikes us as weird.

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If you've been wandering around this convention for the past few days, you've probably heard a great deal of talk about sex, foolishness, politics, buggery and babies, but you may also have heard science-fiction discussed once or twice, if you were unable to get away in time. Most of this talk has ignored the fact that science-fiction, as a genre, as a social phenomenon, as a millieu, and as part of a changing world, is a thing that is thoroughly in flux. Those of us whose lives center around science-fiction to one degree or another may tend to overlook the changes that have taken place in this field, and those that are yet to come. Perhaps this is because we're too close, too absorbed in surface detail to be able to easily see an overall pattern. Perhaps, in spite of all the bluster and furor of the past few years, the changes have come upon us gradually enough not to alarm us. Certainly things like the New Wave-Old Wave struggle, or the magazines versus anthologies arguments that have absorbed so much of our time are only surface symptoms of a deeper unrest. They are basically teapot tempests. Like most holy wars, they are unwitting stage misdirection.

The fact is, in spite of all our previous booms and crashes, we may only now be coming down to science-fiction's first real identity crisis.

Being a snot-nosed kid by trade, I can't claim that my involvement with science-fiction goes back any great way. There are gentlemen at this convention—Will Jenkins, for example—whose antecedents go back four or five times as far as mine. But even in the relatively short time that I've been into reading science-fiction, things have changed dramatically.

I may have been attracted to science-fiction as a kid simply because it was such a hopelessly underdog sort of genre. This struck a sympathetic response in my soul, as I myself was such a hopelessly underdog sort of kid. In those days, we were shunned and ostrasized for reading science-fiction. If you happened to be unwise enough to read a science-fiction magazine on a bus or a subway, then you had to be prepared to face an entire spectrum of disapproval and opprobrium, shading from disgusted looks to disbelieving headshakes and right on through to open laughter and frank ridicule. We, the science-fiction readers, were the outcasts in school. Hell, we were the nebishes, the schmucks, the losers. Almost to a man, we were considered to be nuts. We were told to get our heads out of the clouds. We were told to put our feet back on the ground. We were told to put our noses to the grindstone. And so we'd try it periodically, walking along with our feet on the ground, all squinched over so we could simultaneously get our heads out of the clouds and keep our noses on that grindstone, and afterawhile that'd get to be a real drag. The grindstone was too heavy, and we'd get crinks in our necks from walking squinched over. So we'd go back to reading science-fiction, and it'd start all over again. Teachers would give us cautious heart-to-heart talks. The librarian would sneer when we checked out the latest Andre Norton book. Our parents would perform that parently exercise known as Viewing With Alarm. I had to read my science-fiction at night in bed, and if I heard my parents coming I'd duck the book under the pillow and pretend to be asleep. My father told me more than once that if I kept reading science-fiction it would ruin my life—and considering how things've turned out and the amount of money I make per

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year, he was probably right. My parents wanted me to read Good Literature so that I'd get culture. My parents couldn't tell a polinaise from a mayonaise, or Tannhauser from Tarzan, but they wanted me to get Culture. Science-fiction definately wasn't Culture. It was junk.

And yet, that had its points. I can remember going into bookstores as a kid, and there would be row after row of books, thousands of them, everywhere you could look. And every one of those books advertised itself as good. Most of them bore quotes from learned Critics on the covers, most of them had blurbs heralding them as masterpieces of fiction or as significant milestones in the history of modern literature. They all looked stylish and dignified. They all looked boring. And there they all were, looming up around me like two-color paper beanstalks. It was frightening. It was scary, and it was frightening. Now, even as a kid, I had an intuition that told me that *all* of these books couldn't be significant masterpieces of modern literature. *Some* of them had to be bad. But how was I supposed to tell which ones were which? They all looked the same, they all promised the same goods. How could I tell? I was only a kid of twelve or so, I didn't know anything about literature, didn't know how to judge it, and probably only had a dollar a week to spend on books anyway, so I couldn't afford to waste it. It was scary, and it was frustrating.

And then I'd walk over to the science-fiction section. And there they'd be—a rack of cheap, frumpy paperbacks, shoddily put together, printed on the worst paper, the edges not even cut, all of them smelling like woolen pajamas that have been worn for a week. So I'd stand there and look at them, God! look at the incredible covers they had. All the covers were lurid beyond belief, they were full of giant eyeballs, and spaceships, and flying saucers, and monsters. There were well-developed young women in filmy bras or bronze breastplates who were about to be grabbed by oozing, slimey, thousand-tentacled horrors, and the titles of these things were always *Sex Kings of Mars* or *The Lust-Maddened Artichokes That Devastated Cleveland*. And so I'd stand there and look at all this, and suddenly I'd feel a vast wave of relief wash over me. I was safe. I *knew* that this was junk. Suddenly there was no confusion at all. There was no chance of getting stuck with good literature. I *knew* science-fiction was crap. What relief!

Things have changed a little today.

Today science-fiction is In. It is acceptable, it is even respectable. Oh, there are holdouts to be sure, but the tide of opinion has definitely changed. On today's college campuses it is stylish and hip to read science-fiction, and science-fiction consistantly outsells everything else in college bookstores. Science-fiction is the In Thing even in most high-schools. Teachers may even encourage their charges to write term-papers and theses about science-fiction, although when I tried that in high-school I got a flat flunking grade and a nasty remark that science-fiction was an unsuitable topic for literary evaluation. Today academians are swarming all over us, and that onslaught is hardly begun. Today, Isaac Asimov gets asked to write articles for the big, important, ultra-respectable periodicals, and during space shots we get to watch Walter Cronkite asking Clarke and Heinlein for their opinions. We have definitely arrived.

Somehow my reaction to this is one of perverse disappointment.

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Now that the mainstream has accepted us, they are eventually going to ask just what it is they've clutched to their collective bosoms, and it will be up to us to provide an answer.

Unfortunately, there are as many different answers for that as there are members of the science-fiction community.

At home in the slums of Philadelphia, I have a homemade bookcase built out of boards and bricks. One side of it is held up by a cinderblock; the other side rests on a book called *The Throne of Saturn*, by Alan Drury. They are of about equal density.

Actually, there is nothing at all wrong with this book, except that everything in it has been said a hundred times before, said better, more vividly, and a thousand times more concisely. As science-fiction, as we know it, it is a bust: it's at least a decade behind the genre, more perhaps. And yet, for this book Drury was probably paid ten times as much as the majority of genre writers will ever earn for any book of theirs.

And this is by no means an isolated example. There's Ira Levin's *This Perfect Day*, for example, and lots of others. And a lot more of the same to come.

The big event that has been awaited so eagerly by so many for so long has finally arrived—science-fiction and the mainstream have merged once again. This may ultimately be a good thing, or it may be a disaster for those of us who have grown up during science-fiction's isolationist period. A ghetto is a terrible, squalid place to live but in some ways it is also a community, a positive thing—when you finally claw your way out of it, you may get rid of its disadvantages, but you also inevitably lose its benefits. You swap them, one for one, for new disadvantages. And new advantages. But once you lose the old set, which you may at least have become resigned to, you never get them back. Similarly, science-fiction's long schism from the body of respectable literature is over, and I expect that it is over for good.

What is this going to do to us—to the writers, to the fans, to all this patchwork eccentric society?

For one thing, I suspect that science-fiction may eventually split into two major branches: ours, that built on the foundations laid during the genre's isolationist period and sharing its goals and values, and theirs, which for the most part is oblivious to that foundation, except for the distorted image of it reflected in movies and TV. It would be foolish to try to say which branch is good and which bad, or which actual and which fake but without making sweeping value judgments like these, we can still safely suppose that the two branches will be wildly different in values, in goals, in methodology and in thematic content. Neither will it be completely improbable to guess that their branch of science-fiction might well become the major branch, might well become more important than ours—if you judge importance by criteria like money, critical success and wide audiences. We will be dissatisfied with this stuff, certainly, but who are we but a disgruntled bunch of cranks and hairsplitting purists anyway? If majority rules, then we may be voted out of our franchise. Publishing is a cynical business, and money talks loudest there. If we accept books like *The Throne of Saturn* and *This Perfect Day* as examples of what I must call mainstream SF for lack of a better term, then a precident has already been set that such books by far outsell books

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like *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *To Your Scattered Bodies Go*. Certainly a few genre writers, usually those with large reputations in this field, have started to receive mainstream recognition, mainstream rates of payment, and wider distribution of their books. But a lot more well-known mainstream writers are playing in our ballpark than there are science-fiction writers playing in theirs. It's been traditional in publishing that you don't put the words 'science-fiction' on the cover of a book if you want it to appeal to a wide audience, but I think this is changing—science-fiction is selling now, and if it continues to sell you may see publishers reversing this old process and slapping the science-fiction label on books as a selling point wherever it's even marginally justifiable. And if the sales-charts continue to sing the same song they've been singing, then we find ourselves right back in the ghetto again, except this time the ghetto is surrounded by a ring of tanks. So that if you want to write genré SF, you have to accept today's same miserable rates, but if you want to make a lot of money writing SF then you have to turn out something like *This Perfect Day*.

This won't necessarily come about, but it *could* happen. We genre science-fiction people like to prop up our egos with talk about how we are the most intelligent writers with the most intelligent readers in the world, and so on, but this kind of elitism is just whistling in the dark, purely and simply that. As bitter a pill as it is for us to swallow, we are all relatively unimportant in our effect on the scheme of things. Many publishing houses will tell you that the majority of science-fiction books sold are bought by people who have no connection at all with organized fandom, most of whom have never even heard of it, and many of whom in fact do not even think of themselves as science-fiction readers. The biggest market for science-fiction today, and the plum for which all the publishing houses are snapping avidly, is the college market, and the high-school market. Many of those people—I might even venture to say most of them—have no connection with fandom, and have made no systemized study of science-fiction. And although it is rankest heresy to say so, fandom is not a drop in the bucket compared to the college market alone, and as long as it is that college market that makes the majority of purchases, it is that market that the publishers will attempt to cater to. Similarly, it is also true that there are a large number of writers who publish books as science-fiction who are not members of SFWA, and who are not conversant with the genre as such. Survivors survive, as Charles Fort said, and it is by no means certain at this time who will be the survivors. To dismiss the matter and warm ourselves with our secretly virtuous insides would be a dangerous bit of self-indulgence. A lot of the odds are weighted toward mainstream SF; for one thing, it is not usually very rigorous scientifically, and if there is one thing the average citizen is ignorent of, it is science—just how ignorent most of us don't even realize; for another, it usually does not require the gradual assimulation of a stock of concepts and preassumptions, as good genre SF almost always does—few of us realize how incomprehensible a sophisticated SF book can be to someone who hasn't learned our language; for another, much of the stuff that used to be exciting material for speculation has now passed into the realm of the commonplace and the mundane—this is why Drury can get away with writing a

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500-page book about a flight to Mars, and why Baird Searles refused to review *Marooned* in his *F&SF* column on the grounds that it wasn't science-fiction. When I was in the Army a few years ago, I went with some friends to see a movie called *Planet of the Apes*. When it reached the end, where Charlton Heston finds the ruined Statue of Liberty sticking up out of the ground, I groaned in disgust. My friends though, who weren't SF fans, were honestly moved, and thought it was a great ending. They, of course, had never seen it before. So it goes.

At the moment, genre SF still has something of an edge over mainstream SF, mostly because we have been the only peddlar of that particular brand of snake-oil for so long that outsiders rather rashly believe that we know what we're talking about when we discuss it. They take us on faith, to a certain extent, so that the opinions of our most prominant wisemen still count for something in the minds of the publishers.

So the mainstream people, in some time and in some way, come to us to be educated in the genre. Most of them are just as confused by the whole tangle as we are, so they come to us and ask us just exactly what science-fiction is.

Hoo boy!

We can't tell them.

As an assembelege, we have no idea what science-fiction is. I have an idea, and you have an idea, and he over there has an idea, but put them together and you begin to notice certain discrepancies.

The mainstream questioner will gain no certain knowledge from us; instead he will get theological hairsplitting and theory-spinning abstract enough to match the medievalists with their pinheads and dancing angels. It's a fine, intricate game that we play with this, but its one of little practical value, and more than uninteresting to outsiders who are not qualified to play.

There has never been a satisfactory definition of science-fiction, although people have used up whole forests-worth of paper in the effort to find one. My personal favorite has always been Damon Knight's to the effect that science-fiction is what you point at when you say science-fiction. But that's no good for outsiders, who are probably too perplexed already to appreciate the irony.

We complicate the matter further by espousing opinions about the purpose of SF that we ourselves no longer really believe in, although we still pay them lip service. It is common to impress an outsider by boasting of science-fiction as a vehicle for predicting the future. For the most part this is a shuck, fellars and gals, and you know it as well as I do. It's mostly something that you say to distainful unbelievers to persuade them that there are some solid real-world reasons why you read that Crazy Buck Rogers Stuff. I doubt if this will be quite so impressive, now that the futurologists are gaining more and more public esteem. And it is mostly a shuck. Technology assessment is a tricky game at best. Remember that every family was supposed to be flying his own plane or helicopter by now—all those stories about how the sky of 1970 darkened with the aerial traffic jams of millions of privately owned planes; that one was so all-persuasive that engineers and city planners advised New York City not to build the second tube for the Lincoln Tunnel but to build airports along the Hudson instead to accommodate the sky-hoppers. And even when the technology is predicted with fair accuracy, social factors are almost

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always missed that change the whole picture. Jules Verne predicted quite a bit of our technology, but described it working inside a Victorian economy and society without working any change on that society at all.

Sometimes the justification is thrown out to mainstream people that science-fiction is an important vehicle for social change through social criticism, spotting the future ills of civilization before they develop. This is also of dubious veracity to me—science fiction has been warning the world about various evils for years, and yet those evils have continued to appear on schedule.

It is often alleged that real science-fiction can be judged by the accuracy of its scientific content, and so we hear much virtuous talk about hard science, as opposed to the pseudo, running-dog-lackey variety. There have even been attempts made to characterize true science-fiction as being technologophillic in attitude, while the unkosher stuff is technologophobic. Here too, we must tread most carefully. When the potent name of hard science is reverently invoked in this genre, then the fan invoking it is almost always thinking of the natural sciences, physics, astronomy and the like. The most narrow visioned of fans would like to make the hard science definition of SF even more restrictive by specifying that scientific accuracy is the touchstone only if the science utilized in the story is one of these natural sciences. So that a story rigorously utilizing nuclear physics is real SF, while a story rigorously utilizing one of the soft sciences, like biology, genetics, or anthropology, is not, or at best a second-class citizen which must keep in its place. Never having been much good at passing camels through the eye of a needle, I find that a little hard to accept. And to rule out technologophobic fiction is to deny large parts of that very foundation upon which genre science-fiction was built, including much of Wells, among others. Then you have to stop and ask yourself, what is scientific accuracy, and how much difference is there between what the author thinks it is and what it is in actuality? I would venture to say that many science-fiction writers, even those who have a reputation for hard science-fiction, don't really know what's going on at the forefront of science and technology. Most probably an SF writer somewhere at this very moment is writing a story based on premises he thinks are accurate, and which most fans will accept as accurate when they read the story, and which have just been completely debunked at some scientific research institute. This is one of the built-in hazards of writing science-fiction, and it is unavoidable—but it is also why it is a mistake to make this business of accuracy a holy criterion, a religion. And what about those stories that have become outdated by history or science, like all those stories that take place on a Mercury that doesn't rotate, or all those stories of 1973 with millions of private helicopters in the sky? Stories that try to be rigorous, but are outdated by information that the writer could not possibly have known about. Take *Nerves*, by Lester del Ray, for instance, a story which was considered an epitome of rigorous scientific speculation when it was written. The areas of expertise utilized here are medicine and nuclear engineering—I have been assured by experts in both fields that the story's scientific content is now totally obsolete. And yet *Nerves* is one of the classic science-fiction stories of all time, continually being reprinted, and pointed out as a model

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even today. Do we judge it by its intent or by its execution? And when its scientific content became obsoleted, did the story stop being science-fiction? And how do you judge a book like Avram Davidson's *The Phoenix and the Mirror*, where the technology is as rigorously worked out and as self-consistently utilized as anything by Larry Niven, and yet the technology is the technology of the Middle Ages, and the science the consensus of the wisemen of those days as to what the world was. As is our science today, and ours may look just as pitifully outdated as theirs when looked back upon two hundred years from now.

What are we left with then, for criteria? Well, there is always the 'sense of wonder' that we hear so much about, and with that we are getting a little closer to what we need. The trouble is, the stuff capable of invoking the sense of wonder these days is not necessarily the same stuff it was when we were kids, back before we actually started going to the moon instead of just dreaming about it.

When it comes to invoking the sense of wonder, both sides of the New Wave-Old Wave dispute are handicapped, and the most extreme stories in either camp usually fail in invoking anything except boredom. This is especially true if you look at it from the perspective of our mainstream outsider.

The New Wave blows it by turning out stories that are indistinguishable from the stories that fill avant-garde mainstream quarterlies and little magazines. The mainstream observer has seen all this before, and he is not impressed. The most extreme of these so-called New Wave writers have abandoned the thread of rationality that is part of genre SF's philosophical heritage, and so have diminished their work.

The Old Wave fouls up by continuing to write the same old thing year after year, turning out the same old plots like yard-goods, chewing toothlessly on the same cardboard characters and played-out concepts. For the sense of wonder can not be hacked, it can not be produced on demand simply by writing about spaceships and intergalactic empires, although many genre writers are cynical enough to think that it can be. The great stories that founded genre SF were able to invoke the sense of wonder so completely not because it is naturally inherent in tales of star-wandering, but because the abstract idea, the dream of space travel was so blazingly important and overwhelmingly exotic to those people. It was a fantasy to them, a cherished one, and no matter how much they rationally believed in the conquest of space, it was their eager fantasing about it that gave SF its power. The reality of space travel is somewhat more prosaic, as dreams are more intense than experience, but the most extreme of the Old Wave writers go on manipulating symbols that have lost some of their power and hold, even over the writers themselves. The cut-and-dried place that they make of the galaxy, not even as interesting as Earth, leaves us with no surprise that the sense of wonder doesn't live there any more. They have abandoned that thread of irrationality, of fantasy, that is part of genre SF's philosophical heritage, and so have diminished their work.

In the last few years we have seen a number of highly-popular works, produced by both sides of the ideological dispute, that gain much of their power by rationalizing traditional fantasy, that keep the inner power of the dream and the irrational, but at-

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tempt to analyze it in terms of the known and the rational, that attempt to fuse yin and yang, to invoke works that will invoke the sense of wonder without insulting the rational intellect.

To me, if there is a hope for genre SF, it lies in stories like these. But we will not find our way to them by accident, by blundering along through the dark as we have been. We will not find them by remaining divided against ourselves, by Balkinizing SF into squabbling ideological camps.

It is time for a synthesis, a melding together of all that has been done in the past turbulent decade. It is time for a mending of houses.

It is up to all of us to do this, up to the fans and the writers and the editors. If we can put up a solid enough, real enough front, and advance enough quick enough, then it may be our brand of science-fiction that becomes the wave of the future.

But we can not do it this way, not the way we are, not if we continue in the direction we've been going.

There is an old proverb to the effect that a man who does not know and love himself cannot possibly be known and loved by others. Let's think how true that is of science-fiction, and then let's try to do something about it.

—GARDNER DOZOIS

Triptych (Continued from page 49) decadent and out of connection to their history are unable to deal with this and although their slaves express great willingness to fight, being (like all slaves) closer to their physical impulses, they do not listen. They are, thus, all killed and their ships occupied by members of the Earth crew who turn them back toward the solar system as booty.

THE PARTY: There is a brief celebration of victory aboard the Earth ship (now the flagship of a captured brigade) on the triumphant return flight. The bio-technician, now relaxed by intoxicants, sings to the assembled crew and then, in a more serious mood, declaims that he realizes he was almost responsible for defeat because of that disgusting sentiment which he has now outgrown. The crew salute him with cheers and the bio-technician ecstatically opens all of the evacuation vaults, thus permitting the pure air of space to rush in and strangle them all, in the midst of glory.

—BARRY N. MALZBERG

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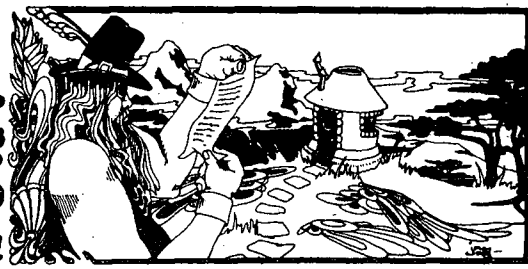

Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet, and addressed to According To You, *Box 409, Falls Church, Va., 20046.*

Mr. White:

You do not have to print this letter if you do not wish to waste space, but if you would do one thing for me I would remain eternally in your debt.

Could you print—in your *According To You* column, if possible—the titles of as many Fritz Leiber novels, stories, anthologies, etc., concerning Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser? Ever since I read his novella, "Ill Met in Lankhmar," I have been searching for more F.&G.M. stories like a bat out of hell—

—And I can't find any!

Mr. Leiber writes a column for FANTASTIC, so you're the only one I know to go to for help.

Help!

RICHARD GREHAN
(no address on letter)

Fritz Leiber replies:

There have been six collections of stories of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser: *Two Sought Adventure,* published by Gnome Press, a hardcover long out of print, and *Swords and Deviltry, Swords Against Death, Swords in the Mist, Swords Against Wizardry,* and *The Swords of Lankhmar,* all published by Ace Books, which plans to reissue them all, beginning late in 1973. The first two of the Ace five are currently available from New English Library, Great Britain. I've written three new Fafhrd-Mouser stories since the Ace books were collected and plan to do many more.

FRITZ LEIBER
San Francisco, California

And one of them is to be found in this issue.—TW

Dear Ted,

While reading Dan Eiler's suggestions for future *Star Trek* episodes in the July Issue, I couldn't help but think that Eiler has missed the theme of *Star Trek* completely. *Star Trek* offers plausible outcomes to the future using science fact as well as fiction to develop the plot and to bring across a point whether a relevant problem of today or moral issues or whatever. What Eiler suggests is pure fantasy. The idea of the Ursa Major Constellation coming to life as a "space bear" and then have the Enterprise transported to the Eighteenth Century to equip Daniel Boone with a "cosmic-powered knife" to do battle with the Great Bear is entirely out the Star Trek way of

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thinking. The second suggestion is awfully touchy; even though it would make for a good action story, it would offend a lot of people (myself included). To have Kirk win over God would put Kirk in a position higher than God himself and this is blasphemey (by now, no doubt you've got me pegged as a religious fanatic; ah well) and would not do anything to Kirk's character except to corrupt it, in my mind leastways. Oh well, I thought I'd just point out a few things there; I hope I didn't rub anyone wrong there too bad.

RANDY MOHR
R #1 Box 274W
Othello, Wa. 99344

Ahhh, Randy, I don't think that Dan Eiler really intended his suggestions to be taken seriously . . . —TW

Dear Ted:

Bravo, Alexei and Cory Panshin! I've found his and their steadily developing examination of "the world beyond the hill" an exciting and thought-provoking feature. I have also been disappointed that more has not been said by the readers in the letter column, because I personally consider the Panshins' study to be a seminal contribution to the critical understanding of sf, far surpassing the necessary but elementary approaches of Damon Knight and James Blish. Knight and Blish laid the essential foundation of technical criticism for the improvement of the art, but the Panshins have raised the critical threshold of sf study by an order of magnitude, providing a general theory and vocabulary from which discussion can develop on the higher issues of sf as a literary form.

Their specific arguments may not be irrefutable, but I think that anyone who wants to successfully challenge the Panshins' will have to produce a treatment of equal dimensions—and perhaps this is why readers have been daunted in commenting. For those who agree with them the Panshins have left little to be said; for those who disagree, what needs to be said will be exhausting. I'm not at all embarrassed to admit that one of the two reasons for my own hasty retreat from a budding career of sf commentary in the fanzines two years ago was the perception that Alexei was gropingly but inexorably developing a level of treatment far above that to which the average fan can really contribute.

The Panshins' conclusion that the emotional appeal of sf is largely "adolescent" is surely accurate, and many were calling for adult emotional content in sf before the Panshins. But I wonder if this is not a contradiction in terms or a dilemma of definition. Sf must contain a major element of "the world beyond the hill" or it will not be sf. And so long as the appeal of sf comes from this element the reader will be performing an act of exploration and testing within the terms of the story, whatever its level of emotional maturity.

Now, this exploration and testing is a juvenile behavior pattern essential to learning, a trait that most species largely lose at maturity. Man, of course, does not, and it is this perpetuation of juvenile "play" behavior from the infant's reaching for a strange object dangled over its crib to the scientist's testing of a new mathematical theory that makes man what he is. As someone once said of Jack Vance, he makes the strange seem familiar and the familiar seem strange, and this is a vague but excellent statement of sf's purpose. So it seems

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to me that sf, even when it contains other adult values, will always have at least this one element of "adolescent" emotional appeal.

What I think we have to overcome is the negative connotation of the term juvenile when applied in the way that I have been using it, because as adults we are still very much youngsters in our love of examining the strange and new. By all means let's have adult values in sf, but let's not let the writers forget that even as adults we demand the play opportunity of exploring "the world beyond the hill"—that element of mystery that the Panshins so rightly tag as a requirement of good sf.

DAVID B. WILLIAMS
747 Dee Road
Park Ridge, Ill. 60068

Dear Ted,

I'm writing in response to the final *SF in Dimension* column and Alexi Panshin's book review column in the June 1973 issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction.*

Panshin sees the fragmentation of the current fabric of our times as ominous. He draws parallels between the domination of Science Fictionland by the Heinleins, the Asimovs, and Dylan and the Beatles' domination of Rock. Take these Leaders away and what do you have?

I feel we have independence, freedom, and diversity.

Panshin's statements sound like echoes from the literary establishments of the early Sixties. With Hemingway and Faulkner no longer dominating the scene, the novel was proclaimed *dead,* arts and letters were at their end.

Yet the Sixties were exciting. Experimentation with form and content lead to the emergence of John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, Donald Barthelme. New journals and publishing enterprises were started. Some old sources died, chiefly the *Saturday Evening Post.* But the new writing found outlets, chiefly the *New American Review,* and more recently in *Fiction* and the *American Poetry Review.*

Science Fiction is following this parallel. New writers are emerging, new outlets for talent, like the *Orbit* series, *Dangerous Visions* etc.; the original anthologies: Silverberg's *New Dimensions,* Gerrold's *Protostars,* Goldin's *Alien Condition,* Hoskin's *Infinity* series are springing up all over.

Science Fiction is evolving. It has evolved before and it will again. The evolution is impersonal. Like light shining in your eyes early in the morning. It's not depressing unless you interpret it to be depressing.

Panshin and others see this evolution as fragmentation, hence depressing. I, and others, see that the evolution is raising hell in Science Fictionland. But that's what Future Shock is all about.

It's just like that old Chinese curse: May you live in interesting times.

I don't think Science Fictionland could be more interesting than it is now.

And Ted White, *Amazing* and *Fantastic* are leading the way, making life in Science Fictionland more exciting with new writers, new artists, new formats. Who else would have printed *SF in Dimension?* Who else will continue the critical work that *SF in Dimension* started?

I haven't always agreed with Panshin, but I appreciated the opportunity to have a critical interpretation of the field. I hope you decide to replace *SF in Dimension* with some other column that deals critically with Science Fiction.

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GEORGE KELLEY
240 69th St.
Niagara Falls, N.Y., 14304

I'd like to—but qualified candidates are conspicuously lacking. In the meantime, we're filling in with articles such as Gardner Dozois' Disclave Guest of Honor speech, this issue.—TW

Dear Ted:

Re your "no-reprints" policy: I recall a story by Eric Frank Russell called "Vampire from the Void" that was published in the British magazine *Fantasy* circa 1938; I'm almost positive this is the same story that ran in the October FANTASTIC. I thought it worthy of calling to your attention (if you don't know already, may I ask who sold you the story?); but since nobody else seems to have noticed the origin of EFR's "NEW" novelet, perhaps it would have been best if we were all left none the wiser.

RICHARD BRANDT
4013 Sierra Drive
Mobile, Alabama, 36609

Yours was the second letter I received in which it was suggested that the story we published was the same story which had been published in Britain in the late thirties. The first letter simply noted the coincidence of titles, without reference to similarities in the stories, and I did not give it much consideration, inasmuch as the title (and its first cousin, "Vandals from/of the Void") was popular with several authors in by-gone years. However, after receiving your letter I had an opportunity to discuss the matter with long-time fan and collector Art Saha, and Art is convinced that the two stories are indeed one and the same, although Russell may have done some minor updating in the version which his agent, Scott Meredith, sold to us. Needless to say, we purchased the story as a new story and with no idea that it had made its first appearance in print some thirty-five years ago. Under the circumstances there is relatively little we can do now, and had readers like yourself not called this situation to our attention, I should have said that the appearance of the story in a relatively obscure, short-lived, British publication some thirty-five years ago would mean little to our present readership. As it is, we can only apologize to those of you who recognized the story and admit that your eyes were sharper (and your memories keener) than ours.—TW

Dear Editor,

First, let me mention that I am a science fiction fan from the days of *Future S-F, Planet Stories,* and especially, *Planet Comics:* consequently, I most deeply resent Richard Kyle's reference to *Planet Comics* as "trash". Kyle is really cruisin' for a bruisin', or else a blast from this old space pee-lot's disintegrator ray.

I am still a comic book fan-atic, my favorites being the DC books edited by Schwartz & Bridwell. I enjoy your editorials, Ted; however, I really miss those fabulous analyses by R.A.W. Lowndes, as well as the way-out humor of Sarge Saturn. Why don't you try to answer *some* of the letters in the style of ye ol' Sarge ??? !

Why are some so-called fans embarrassed by the term science fiction? Why are people ashamed to buy comic books? I don't give a damn about society's opinion of my reading habits, *do you?* In fact, I have read comic book yarns that I consider Dostoievskyian

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masterpieces; if someone's "peers" criticize him or her for reading s-f, or comix, it would be very easy for a *true* fan to tell the "critic" (or "peer") to *go to hell! Right?* Right on! (I find it easy to tell people to go to hell!)

Conformists call me a "dirty commie" because I vote for the Socialist Labor Party: as far as *I'm* concerned, the "silent majority" can go kiss Robber Baron Rockefeller's ass, especially now that the Big Bankers are collaborating with the Stalinist slavemasters in the Kremlin.

All the features were interesting: I will read the yarns later. Since I unfortunately can only afford to get your 2 mags occassionally, since my magazine budget is used up by my favorite comix and radical political mags, I will close this by saying, "keep up the good work".

ROBERT BURROS
c/o Quinn, 19-20 Linden St.
Ridgewood, N.Y., 11227

Great joltin' space-blasters, pee-lot Burros—you been hitting the Xeno jug again? *Ain't no way you'll get the ol' Sarge revived, no way, no how!*—TW

Dear Mr. White,

I just got the July FANTASTIC and after looking over the features, I'd like to venture a few comments.

I haven't read any of the fiction yet (I usually run through the mag, reading the letters column first, some of the features next, and than digesting the fiction last, usually in bed, late at night). I've just noticed the Harry Roland cover, illustrating the new Conan story. It's very impressive and much more colorful than the Jeff Jones cover for August '72. Roland's figures are very muscular which is good because Conan was a very powerful man and his illustrations bring the fact out very clearly. Frank Frazetta has competition. Roland is that good.

As far as Steve Riley is concerned, I believe even if he's wrong, he's entitled to his opinions. Roland's interior illustrations for "The Witch of the Mists" are vaguely familiar. Take the case of one illustration: page 42. It does bear similarities to Frank Frazetta's cover illustration of *Conan the Conqueror*. Both have Conan charging on a steed. But there the likeness ends. The *CTC* cover has him charging into flaming battle while the "TWOTM" illustration has the Cimmerian riding through dark woods. The Roland Conan is entirely different from Frazetta's. It is possible that it was just a coincidence—they *do* happen. I sincerely doubt if Roland would have done what Riley says he did. Hang onto Roland, he's damn good.

One last item. Riley's ranking down of L. Sprague deCamp and Lin Carter. They probably don't need me to defend them but I will anyway. I enjoy their Conan novellas very much since I love sword and scorcery fantasies and "The Witch of the Mists" was very enjoyable. Maybe it wasn't a fantasy masterpiece (does everything have to be arty or earth shaking to be good?) but it was well written and entertaining. That is all I ever ask of any piece of fiction. That it entertains and doesn't bore you when you read it. If Mr. Riley doesn't like deCamp and Carter's interpretations of Conan than he shouldn't bother with them.

I hope FANTASTIC lasts another 20 years. We need good, well written fantasy fiction and you along with Lin Carter and Ballantine's Adult Fantasy line of paperbacks are providing it for us. Good luck to you both.

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RAYMOND J. BOWIE JR.
31 Everett Avenue
Somerville, Mass. 02145

Riley's letter provoked considerable controversey, as the following letters make clear.—TW

Ted—

With reference to Steve Riley's letter in the July, 1973, FANTASTIC:

Two things. First, Riley isn't the only Conan fan who has ever expressed disapproval at the work of de Camp and Carter on the character. Much of the problem stems from the fact that these two talented writers don't slavishly follow the style of RE-Howard, and their product, subsequently, does not sit well with Howard fans.

This doesn't mean the work is not good, as Riley implies (read *Shouts From The Rooftops!!!*), but merely that it is different—and, like most human beings, fantasy fans fear things that are different. Unfortunately, Howard refused us the pleasure of his company beyond the age of 30, so the purists will have to either stick with the 20 or so Conan stories Howard did in his lifetime, or change their tastes.

Thing two: I hate to question any reader for a statement from an LoC—but where is Riley an art major? Going a step beyond Mr. Roland's excellent reply, I find it difficult to believe that a serious student of art would describe an artistic swipe as a *cardinal sin;* to the contrary, it is an excellent learning tool which allows the student to see exactly how a specific illustration is put together. It is not a true analogue (sorry, Ted) to the literary swipe, since a story can usually be analyzed without reconstructing it from the base up.

It is certainly plagiarism to copy, line for line, another artist in his illustration—or even in basics such as pose.

However, observe the world of four-color comics: here, almost every artist has been influenced by such greats as Kirby, Eisner (by the bye, any non-comic fans will have to sit out this list—but, believe me, these guys *are* famous), Frazetta . . . in fact, some artists (such as Starlin, Ploog, and Wrightson, respectively) have built their careers on emulating those greats—but rarely by swiping *per se.*

Still, how can one keep from remembering the classic poses of the masters?

Maybe the question is academic, but Mr. Riley should give it some serious thought; if he continues on with an artistic career, he will someday be accused of plagiarism. Only a realistic appraisal of the work in question will bring out the truth—if he applies his artistic and moral arguments to his own work, everything he produces could be deemed a swipe.

F. J. HAYES III
Hayes House
1111-11th Street
Moline, IL 61265

Even some novice authors have tried rewriting stories they liked—purely as exercises, not for sale—in order to learn something about the way good stories are written. Raymond Chandler, for instance, gave much credit to the fact that, before he sold his first story, he copied word for word an Erle Stanley Gardner Black Mask *novelette and then attempted to rewrite it to see how he might improve upon it. He credited it as a valuable learning experience. A great many artists, of course, do exactly the same thing.*—TW

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Dear Ted;

I seldom write letters-to-the-editor (I hate trusting my missives to our beknighted postal service) but in this instance, I believe I must. I just read the July FANTASTIC and saw the letter by Steve Riley about the work of Harry Roland. Steve asserts that Roland's Conan illos in the August issue were "swiped" from some of Frazetta's Conan covers. Roland denys all and suggests that Mr. Riley ". . . is a rather unhappy person." I must take exception to this.

Although you support Roland in your editorial, it appears to me that there may perhaps be a doubt in your own mind, else why the careful assertion that Roland's cover is his own with no "swipes" from others. I must assert that the illos in point (from the August FANTASTIC) did indeed appear to be swiped from Frazetta's covers for *Conan the Adventurer* and *Conan the Conquerer*. Despite Mr. Roland's advice that I look them over once again, I cannot but note that the figures, positioning, and general "feel" of the scenes in question are mightily like Frazetta's.

Your assertion that Mr. Roland is a friend of Jones, Kaluta, Wrightson and others does nothing to negate that claim; in fact Jeff and Mike were both of the opinion that the illos in question *were* mightily similar to Frazetta's. I do not mean to suggest that Mr. Roland is deliberately plagiarizing Frazetta's work, on the contrary; I know how difficult it is for an artist, especially one who admires Frazetta's work, to avoid picking up his figures, especially Conan, on whom Frazetta's work has been definitive. I feel that Steve Riley's point is well taken, and feel that Roland's answer was improper, and, in fact, immaterial.

In conclusion I *will* say that I liked Roland's Conan cover, and did not feel it was a direct swipe from Frazetta like the others. I hope to see more work from him in future, and hope that his style develope to the point where it will become *impossible* to make further charges of this kind.

DOUG MURRAY
524 No. Hamilton Ave.
Lindenhurst, N.Y. 11757

The "doubt" you infer from my editorial is an unfounded as was Steve Riley's original charge of plagiarism against Roland.—TW

Dear Ted;

Re: July FANTASTIC.

For some reason, I found the Conan story superior to the prior one; actually more of a plot or something to it, that made it more than just a bundle of words. The other fiction: The Eklund good as usual, a rather unique approach, I suppose, to the after-the-disaster story. The Haldeman was beyond mere understanding; I may be old-fashioned on this point, but I like stories with beginnings, middles and ends. Perhaps a psychoanalyst could say what all the symbolism meant . . . which, of that at least, I'm sure.

Liked the concluding installment of the Panshins' column; even if I don't fully agree with whatever it was they were trying to point out about S.F. Their idea of best writers, for instance, are not in agreement with my own. But the mere attempt at giving meaning to the genre is a noble attempt. As to the *Dangerous Visions* series: has anyone an idea on when *The Last Dangerous Visions* is coming out? If I read the intro to the second book correctly, it should have been out about six months

(Continued on page 92)

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fantasy books

REVIEWED BY FRITZ LEIBER

THE HEIRS OF BABYLON, by Glen Cook, Signet Books, New American Library, 1972, 95¢, 184 pages.

Unquestionably, here is the first work of a major talent in science fiction and fantasy.

It is the story of an antique destroyer's cruise half way around the world, about two hundred years in the future. After a nuclear Ragnarok stemming from pollution, over-population, over-industry, and overly clever political management, a few determined men keep alive a Great War fought with treasured weapons that can sometimes be repaired, but never replaced.

It is an exploration of one of the key puzzles of our times, that of the German military mentality.

It is an excellent sea story of fighting ships, in the tradition of Forester's and Conrad's, *The Cruel Sea, The Dragon in The Sea, Delilah, Spaceman Jones, The Caine Mutiny, Tros of Samothrace,* etc. No surprise to hear that its author had several years of experience aboard American fighting ships.

To a degree remarkable in a young writer, it is beautifully structured and motivated, and written with unwavering control.

If you don't read it attentively, you may be bothered by the multiplicity of characters and sometimes confuse them and have to check back. This minor flaw could have been avoided if the author had more sharply characterized each person on introduction, given them more identifying mannerisms, and moderated his way of calling them now by first name, now by last.

A very exciting book.

CAPTIVE OF GOR, by John Norman, Ballantine Books, 1972, 95¢, 370 pages.

My Film Critic Friend, who gets me free into screenings of new flicks, says I have an almost infallible instinct for missing the bummers. I have no advance information on them, but I somehow pass up her invitations to preview what turn out to be stinkers.

For years I've somehow missed reading even one of the many highly popular (I'm told) books about the planet of Gor. Nary a single "Chronicle of Counter-Earth" have I cracked. But now no longer. I've read *Captive.*

You all know, I'm sure, the formula. A vain, proud, beautiful, man-teasing

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society girl is kidnapped by shadowy interplanetary slavers. Although fighting every inch of the way, she comes to know the lash, the auction-block, and the hot clutch of sinewy male fingers. She scurries all over a strange world, getting captured, stripped, and ingeniously maltreated in every chapter. Eventually a tall, dark, princely man, cruelest of the cruel and war chief paramount, falls in love with her. He does his best to conceal this unworthy feeling, for she is only a slave girl and from the third-rate planet Earth at that. In fact, he puts her through a whole new set of ingenious torments. But in the end he can hide his true feelings no longer. He kidnaps her for a last time. She becomes His Wife and finally learns, with infinite satisfaction, what it is to be a True Woman, mastered and revered, and not a Vain, Proud Girl.

This male-chauvinist garbage is presented in a language flat as dead champagne. "My master has told me not to describe this world in great detail." Very convenient! And while there is much stripping and raping, genitalia and even secondary sex organs are strangely absent. The cruelties are pretty unimaginative (not really ingenious—sorry), the teasing absent or artless, though it's the S/M scene all right, as we are reassured by such sequences of chapter titles as "The Brand," "The Collar" and "Silken Cords," and also "I Feel the Capture Loop," "I Must Submit," "My Master Will Have His Girl Please Him," and "I Am Chained Beneath the Moons of Gor."

Oh, it's exciting all right. Our libidos have very poor taste. Kinsey says most older men can't make it without using inner fantasies of girls whipping girls and similar schoolboy tommyrot.

But the audience at even the dullest stage play also infallibly feels a stab of sick excitement and fear when one character pulls a gun and points it at another.

Now don't get me wrong. All the other Gor books may be masterpieces of science fantasy. But, as my Film Critic Friend says, I have a certain instinct . . . . .

TO THE SOUND OF FREEDOM, by Robin Scott Wilson and Richard W. Shryock, Ace, 1973, 95¢, 219 pages.

This entertaining little novel of twin towns just across the border from each other in West and East Germany has several things going for it. Its two authors (Robin Scott well known for his science fiction and his heading of the Clarion Writing Workshop) know their modern Germany on both sides of the Iron Curtain and present a lively, racy picture of it.

They successfully mix earthy humor and grim realism.

They have a keen satiric eye for the ridiculousness of Western Germany and its gay capitalist generosities and corruptions, and also for the grimmer and puritanic ridiculousness of Eastern Germany.

And they have a catchy idea for the theme of the story.

The book also has a little going against it. The catchy idea is given away too soon, so that some of the movements of the characters become pretty obvious manoeuvers to get them into the right spot for the climax.

Also, the point of view changes very often, a common weakness in modern novels, which can't always be *Point Counterpoint* or *Men of Good Will.*

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SURVIVAL PRINTOUT, edited by Total Effect, Vintage, 1973, $1.95, 332 pages.

In the Fantasy Books section of the Oct. 1970 issue of FANTASTIC, I accused the author Peter Saxon of the ultra-melodramatic *Dark Ways to Death* of being a computer. My accusation was based on the incredible number of cliches and quasi-plagiarisms riddling the book.

I don't know if my guess was right. I have received a letter assuring me that Peter Saxon is a real man, something I still find hard to believe.

However, my general prediction—of computers producing books—is at last substantiated in part! *Survival Printout* is unquestionably edited by a computer working with three human colleagues. The computer is Illiac 4, fourth-generation Burroughs Corporation giant general-purpose computer capable of executing 250 million instructions per second and using the SEMANT program. Its three human colleagues are Leonard Allison, Leonard Jenkin, and Robert Perrault, the four-person team calling itself Total Effect.

The editing job took two years, so we can be fairly sure that computers will not very often be used by publishers, who are generally an impatient breed, once they get a book in the works.

However, the resultant anthology is a most distinguished one—something I have to say because it includes a story of mine. I am very impressed by a computer that would pick up "The Secret Songs," superficially a story unlikely to appeal to a computer, since it concerns very human beings rather than cold, efficient machines.

There are also four highfaluting science articles by Loren Eiseley, Arthur C. Clarke, Nigel Calder, and I. S. Shklovskii and Carl Sagan; "Terminal Beach" by J. G. Ballard; "I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream," by Harlan Ellison; and equally distinguished tales by Alfred Bester, Roger Zelazny, Robert Silverberg, R. A. Lafferty, Samuel R. Delany, Clifford Simak, Cordwainer Smith, Robert A. Heinlein, and James Blish.

No question but that Illiac 4 had impeccable literary taste written into its program.

—FRITZ LEIBER

According To You (Continued from page 89)

ago. (My idea of this Ellison editorship: whether or not it achieved what it set out to do, it certainly collected countless authors I had never heard of before, and made me a fan of most.)

The Hugo voting system sounds like a Chinese puzzle. Under loose interpretation, it sounds as if the winner could end up being the magazine the majority voted third on, instead, of the pluralistic favorite. Is this good or bad? I certainly don't know; but wonder yet where that Farmer novel came from that beat the Silverberg one out.

The concept of the Postal increases—exceeding 100%—is that it's a) against the so-called price freeze controls, and b) it has a good chance of killing off the small-fries. Double postal rating, whether it's a few cents or not, has a good chance of removing enough profits to make it impossible for the magazine to be considered favorable by those who publish it. (I've heard arguments from Jakobsson on this; and I figure he must know more than I do on the matter).

As soon as the third part of the novel comes in, I'll read it and tell you what I think of it. (From other joint Panshin stories, I imagine it'll be different from any s&s work I've ever read.)

R. J. SCHENCK
R. D. #1
Canisteo, NY 14823

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Junction (Continued from page 34)
makes the music."

"Can't you hear him? He's shouting."

"His mouth isn't moving."

"Either is yours."

"Let him alone."

Silence. General agreement. Group telepathy. Ned sighed and the greys behind his eyelids turned black. For an instant, he thought he was back in the tunnel. Alone. But he could feel the weight of the people above him, pushing down on him with their pulpy hands and scouring minds. Entering him. Now trying to revive him. Mass penance.

They became a huge toeless foot about to step on him. And he was an insect waiting for two-dimensional death.

V.

WASHED AND BANDAGED, hair neatly combed and smelling of soap, Ned stared out the window at the street below. He pressed his nose against the cold glass, felt the cool rush of air from the air conditioner vent beneath the window. He looked at the blank theater billboards and the crowds in the street. The street had been cordoned off by police and no cars were permitted in the area.

As Ned watched the crowd below, he remembered the faces he had seen in the subway. They passed before him, portraits locked in the cellar of his memory. He examined their scars and birthmarks and wrinkles and expressions. And his mind wandered into new rooms of recent memory. He remembered being carried from the subway station by uniformed men who wheezed and snorted in the heat. Ned could still hear the screeching of subway machines and taste the rubber of the gas mask that was pushed into his face as teargas bombs bloomed over the scum floor.

Ned could feel the crowd below tugging at him. They would not let him alone. They wanted him, needed him. He dreamed of crashing through God's windowglass and falling into their outstretched arms.

But I'll be safe here, he told himself, trying to believe it. I'll control it the next time. The crowds tried to pull his face against the windowpane. They waved to him. Ned tried to feel secure within this large room with its smooth white walls, twin leather couches that faced each other across an expanse of rich brown carpet, dining table surrounded by high-backed chairs, ceiling high bookcases filled with musty smelling books and bric-a-brac of Hummel china, endtables covered with glass, and well stocked bar and early model television. This room was a haven from the harsh realities below. But it was a precarious, transparent nest.

Ned's warm breath fogged the windowpane.

"Everything's gradually changing," said Renny Weissman, the plainclothes detective assigned to stay with Ned. He wore a blue serge suit and a brown striped tie,

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was well over six feet tall, and combed his thick brown curly hair into a pompadour that reminded Ned of a flight of stairs.

Ned didn't turn around, although he could feel the pressure of Weissman's gaze on the back of his neck. He felt the pressure increase as Weissman stepped closer to the window.

"It's stable for a while, and then there's another change. Take this hotel. It used to be the Astor Plaza, a fairly new office building. I was in there a few times, but I didn't like it—it was too big and sterile, reminded me of a hospital.

"Before the Astor Plaza, there was the Astor Hotel. This hotel. It had been here for years, a tourist's hotel—this is the center of the theater district. It was a landmark. And then they tore it down to build the Plaza building.

"Well, after a change—we get them every few days now—the old Astor Hotel had replaced the office building. It was almost the same as the old one, except for those gargoyles on the ledges."

Ned looked at the ledge that passed under the window. It was discolored by pigeon droppings. By pressing his face against the window, Ned could see the gargoyle's outstretched arm. But Ned remembered what the gargoyle looked like: a mottled marble body covered with eyes, some closed, some open. He had seen similar gargoyles in the hospital lobby. They stood under a stained glass window that depicted the baptism of Christ by St. John.

"I don't mind the change at all," Weissman continued. "I always liked the Astor. Used to stop at the coffee shop on Sunday mornings in the old days.

"Strange thing, though, is that when the office building blinked out and the hotel took its place, all the hotel people were at their old jobs. And the office workers—anyone who had been in the building when it blinked out—were all missing. But it happened around one o'clock, and all the executives and company presidents were out to lunch. We lost about four hundred office boys and secretaries.

"Anyway, the city government proclaimed the hotel to be government property—the mayor and mayor's mansion had disappeared, too, that day—and fired all the workers. Some scientist came to the conclusion that the hotel workers couldn't be real. Well, they are. I tracked them down on the welfare books."

Ned didn't reply. He watched the people below. They were carrying placards and silently shouting at him. Ned listened to the hum of the air-conditioner. And heard their thoughts.

"We believe in God and Ned."

A young girl, dressed in dungarees and a paint stained pullover sweater, held up a pane of glass and tried to reflect the sun into Ned's eyes. *"Glass is holy. God protect us from encroaching Hell."*

"We are penitent. We await purgatory, knowing that God's in

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sight."

"Give us another dream. Tell us what to do."

"Another dream. Another dream. Tell us. Tell us."

Ned drew his finger across the steamed window and dreamed about Junction. He imagined how everything was changing, growing more indeterminate for a few moments or hours, and then settling back into known reality, waiting for the glue of newly created reality to harden.

He listened to Weissman's thoughts, theories, and fears, and then reached out into the city. Beyond New York were other cities and towns and farmlands and mountains; but Ned sensed that they were changing faster, that they would soon be swallowed up by Hell. Only New York would remain. And Junction, somewhere in the future.

He let his mind wander into Greenwich Village. He smelled the marigolds, peonies, petunias, geraniums, tulips, and laughed. The streets had been transformed into gardens and flowers bloomed everywhere. Flowers of every description grew on lawns that had once been cement. Bluebonnets, red clover, goldenrod, black-eyed Susan, pink and white lady slippers, iris, dogwood, red roses, Indian paintbrush, bitterroot scented the air, chocked the allergic with pollen. Cars and shops became hothouses for tropical plants.

Ned investigated Wall Street, the small roads and high buildings of the business section. The old mixed with the new. Ned grew impatient and left. His mind lingered in the Brooklyn Tunnel; then floated uptown, past himself and midtown, through Harlem and the Bronx, up the Henry Hudson Parkway, to settle on the cold steel of the George Washington Bridge. Soon, he knew, that, too, would be destroyed, the last door into Hell closed.

Ignoring Weissman and the crowd below, Ned investigated Westchester through the minds of those who lived there. But the crowd below was stabbing him, tearing off his defenses, thrusting unsure fingers into him.

"Help us. We believe in God. We believe in you."

"We believe in you. We believe inyou. Webelieveinyou"

"WebelieveinyouWebelieveinyou Webelieveinyouwebelieveinyou."

"Ned. Ned. Ned. Ned. NedNed. NedNedNednednednedned."

People in Westchester heard the chorus, reached out to Ned and augmented the drone of thoughts. Ned tried to talk, but could only broadcast fear. He pressed his face against the window and screamed.

Weissman's large hands locked over Ned's arms, pulling him away from the window. He tried to break loose and said, "I want to stay. Leave me alone." But he thought, *Please help me, get me away from them, everyone leave me alone, give me the tunnel. I can't stand flesh.*

And then it was over. Weissman crossed the room to the bar and

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mixed himself a drink. Ned returned to the window. He pressed his face against the cool glass. They were still in the street below, shouting, raising their placards, praying and beating their chests.

But Ned couldn't hear them. He was shut inside his hotel room.

VI.

NED AND WEISSMAN were alone in the hotel. The maids and other necessary personnel were permitted inside at certain hours, but other than that the hotel was empty. But it was well guarded. Policemen manned the roof and ledges and formed a human wall around the hotel. A double pane of bulletproof glass had been substituted for the old imperfect windowglass. Ned would not allow the windows to be covered. Although he yearned for the solitude of the tunnel, he had to be able to see into the city, its glass and steel and people. Ned could not understand this ambivalence.

Although Ned was comfortable for the time being, he did not like policemen walking on the roof. He could tolerate them during the stable periods; but during the indeterminate times they would bear down on him with their thoughts. And he would feel the weight of every cell in their bodies.

It was curious, Ned thought, that the position of a body could so affect his mind. Perhaps its cause could be traced to the Mount Sinai Hospital where white capped nurses with small breasts had constantly watched him and doctors in white smocks came in and out without warning. They had tested him for everything, given him GI's and spinals, pricked his fingers, tied hoses around his arms, measured his brain waves, drugged him with this and that, waited for him to dream, x-rayed him, probed, asked questions, would not permit him a whore and told him that he had recently contracted a venereal disease. Penicillin had been in order, and then more smears and psychological tests. And visits by scientists and historians and a philosopher and a few members of the trade press.

Ned had screamed to be left alone, so he was drugged and reexamined. They had found spots on his lung. They measured him and bathed him and collected his urine. And all the tests had proven to be negative (except, of course, the Wasserman).

Ned had taken to sleeping for long periods in the hospital. When awakened, he had refused to talk with anyone. And during the indeterminate times he would squirm in his electric hospital bed and scream and shout that he couldn't stay there. He had said that he couldn't stand everyone dying around him, and that the ghosts of the previously dead were piling up on the soon-to-die.

And they waited. They were interested in his dreams and had wanted to know why everyone else had stopped dreaming about him. Ned had told them that he couldn't

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remember his dreams, but the psychiatrists and psychologists would not believe him. They told him that he was repressing his fears. And they had seemed to know that everyone would soon dream of him again.

So Ned had told them that he could not dream correctly in the hospital. He said that the ghosts of the soon-to-be-dead were crowding into his sleep and taking his dreams. The politicians finally persuaded the doctors and psychologists to move Ned to a dream conducive atmosphere. Ned asked for a hotel because he had read a book by that name one Sunday afternoon in Junction.

Although it was easier in the hotel, Ned still could not remember his dreams, nor affect the dreams of others. And the indeterminate times were becoming worse: too many minds clawed and raked him, gleefully sucked out his energy. When it became intolerable, Ned would fortify himself with Demeral and wish for dreams, Hilda, and some good pot.

Ned stared out the window at the crowds below. The crowds had thinned until there were more white helmeted policemen than spectators. The spectators were losing faith and drifting away, leaving the policemen with no one to watch but themselves.

These city people were different from anyone else, Ned thought. They were so greedy for something more, that when they found it they tried to tear it apart. Although they wanted to merge together—a primeval urge—tradition and morals and blocks of cement and steel and grey skies choked with dust and ennui assured separation. In desperation—or just for fun—they built and then destroyed, one a rationale for the other.

Weissman stepped out of the bedroom and, pulling his narrow brown necktie under his collar, said, "Come on, Ned. Get away from the Goddam window and get dressed. Those people will be here in a few minutes."

Ned ignored him and thought about Hilda. In the indeterminate periods he dreamed about her jellyfat body and auburn hair and tried to make her real. But something was wrong—he could not give her substance. He tried Sandra. She remained a pleasant memory: a pale chiseled face, a pouting mouth, short cropped hair, and black fuzz around her large nipples.

"Come on, Ned, dammit." Weissman finished tying his necktie and smoothed it against his starched white shirt.

"Alright, alright." Ned turned away from the window. Although he was sweaty and needed a change of clothes, he didn't feel like washing and dressing for company. Since he left the hospital, Ned had taken to wearing flamboyant silk shirts—notably those with colorful Hawaiian patterns—and dungarees. The dungarees reminded him of the coarse trousers he used to wear in Junction. In the last few

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days everything—smells, sounds, the play of light on a skyscraper—reminded him of Junction. Memory was beginning to color the past and replace it with its own reality. Past pain and discomfort were, for the sake of pleasant memory, forgotten.

"I'm not going to change," Ned said. "I like this shirt, anyway."

"Well, you'll have to, there's some important people coming up. So take a bath."

"Screw them," Ned said. "What do they want?"

Weissman stretched out on the couch beside the bedroom door, patting his kinky hair in place before he rested his head on the sideboard. "It's something important," he mumbled.

"What's so important?"

Weissman closed his eyes and his left leg slipped from the couch. He buried his toes in the rug. "Something that will happen, can't quite. . ."

"What the Hell's wrong with you?" Ned asked shaking his shoulder. Weissman grunted and smiled. His face softened. By clenching his teeth and sucking in his cheeks, Weissman could tighten his face and give the illusion of alertness and strength. But sleep restored it to its true form. It was as if loose layers of skin were draped over his skull, ready to be pressed and pulled into a desired mask at will.

Weissman had always waited until Ned was asleep before he would catnap. And he would never sleep for more than two hours consecutively. Now Ned could daydream without feeling the pressure of Weissman's gaze on the back of his neck. He could freely walk around the well-provided suite without being followed or spoken to. Or he could try to dream up Sandra or Hilda or even one of the street girls. But everything around him was hard and cold, impervious to his thoughts.

Trying to rationalize a sin he was about to commit, Ned started for the bathroom, which was adjacent to the bedroom. And he remembered his father's words: "Onanists will forever fall through the mirrors of Hell."

Ned's father had once told him that Hell could not claim any glass. That's why Satan invented mirrors, which are made out of darkness and can only show up the evil nature of people. There were no mirrors in Junction. It was said that they had all been thrown into Hell where they would reflect and magnify sorrow and pain.

But there was a mirror over the sink in the bathroom. And all the monsters of Hell were on the other side watching and laughing. The bedroom was even worse: it sported full length door mirrors and a vanity. Ned could not lay on the bed without being seen by monsters on the other side. In the bathroom, at least, he could duck out of sight of the Hellglass.

Yet he had not asked Weissman to have them removed. If he was going to stay here, he would live

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with mirrors and Hell as God had prescribed. He would watch himself sin and grow ugly; he would tolerate Weissman and the men on the roof. And he would give the monsters behind the mirror an eyeful before Weissman woke up.

Ned's wry grin turned to rictus when he saw his father's face in the bathroom mirror. Ned leaned against the sink for support.

"How do you like it here in the midst of Hell?" Ned's father asked.

"How did you get here?"

"Go to sleep and I'll tell you."

Ned noticed that his father's hairline had receded since he had last seen him. Perhaps this was not his father, but a creature from Hell. A misdirection.

"Are you my father?"

"Does it matter, son? Go to sleep and I'll explain."

Ned went into the bedroom and watched his father in the vanity mirror.

"Well," his father said, "lay down and go to sleep."

Ned hesitated, prayed it was his father—but if it wasn't, then it was God's fate—and lay down and held his breath for luck. As he exhaled, he heard his father speak.

"You dreamed that scene in the bathroom, you know. Time can be cut up anyway you like. Substitute the middle for the end, the end for the middle. It doesn't matter. The bathroom scene was hung in the middle of the dream. I reshuffled it so that it would make sense to you. And make you go to sleep."

"But I thought I *was* asleep."

"In a manner of speaking, you were. Different states of consciousness equate to different levels of sleep. At any rate, I simply turned things around. For example, you could easily conceive a child before you were born. And, in fact, you did. Remember Donatello Toth? No, you wouldn't; he died from Parkingson's Disease when you were very young."

"Are you my father?" Ned asked.

"No," the voice said after a pause. "If you like, you can be with-him. But eventually you've got to face this, me, if you like. It is a piece that cannot be ignored if all the reasonable alternatives are going to be—or are, or were—experienced."

Ned tried to open his eyes, but he couldn't. A light flickered before him and he dreamed that he was back in the tunnel.

"Would you like to see Donatello Toth?"

"That's crazy," Ned said, mumbling in his fitful sleep.

"No, it's not. Consecutive time is a mnemonic device, that's all. Cause and effect are only pieces that happen to fit together."

What's a mnemonic device? Ned thought. The voice had lost all its affectations and pomposity. It did not sound like his father and was developing a Brooklyn accent. It rose in register until it sounded like Weissman.

"You know what that is," the voice said. "Push yourself forward, or backward, to wherever the

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answer lies."

And Ned remembered what a mnemonic device was, although he had never heard of one before.

"You really know everything that has been accomplished through evolution. And, of course, everything that has been lost. So, in a way, you know everything."

"Then what's the end?" Ned asked, gaining confidence in this game.

"What we're doing now. And what we'll do later. But this will lead into it. We don't have to worry because we don't have to stay there."

"Here?"

"Open your eyes."

Spread out before Ned was a field scattered with boulders, moss clinging to the interface between rock and soil. But Ned wasn't sure. The field flickered, turned into a forest, and then into Junction.

Ned stood upright. "Am I walking in my sleep?"

"Don't worry," the voice said. "Everyone is watching you. You won't fall."

Ned searched the outskirts of the town, looked for a familiar face. He could not see the glass church, the highest building in Junction. The ground and stones and near-by brook seemed to be whispering, holding conversation, a dialectic he could not yet understand. But Ned did not let himself move randomly. He fought for control, for a graspable succession of events. By choosing cause and effect, he permitted one event to lead into another and ignored the psi handholds that would make him dizzy.

And he found that he was not looking into Junction.

Large split-level houses sported tiers of windows that overlooked rolling hills and pine forests. Swimming pools filled with blue water and bikinied girls with dark tans (and wealthy men with bald heads and pinky rings) became the private oases of this summer green desert. Sleek cars, as yet not invented, moved slowly along the picturesque winding roads.

"Call it Goshen," the voice said. "We'll meet here."

"Why?" asked Ned. "Why do you want to meet with me?"

"Not only with you."

"With whom, then?"

"They're on their way. Wake up."

VII

"COME ON, NED," Weissman said. "Get away from the Goddam window and get dressed. Those people will be here in a few minutes."

Ned ignored him and thought about Sandra. In the indeterminate periods he dreamed about her pouting mouth and the black fuzz around her large nipples and tried to make her real. But something was wrong—he could not give her substance. He tried Hilda. She remained a pleasant memory: a freckled face, jellyfat body that smelled of potatoes, and thick auburn hair.

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"Come on, Ned, dammit." Weissman finished tying his necktie and smoothed it against his starched white shirt.

"Alright, alright." Ned turned from the window. A bath was in order: he was sweaty and his hair smelled sour.

Ned was not in the violet scented lukewarm tubwater for five minutes before Weissman insisted that he get out and dress. While Ned glued his light brown hair to his scalp with orange pomade, Weissman laid out a conservative blue suit and white shirt on the bed for him. But Ned wore a red and blue flowered shirt with a long white collar and tartan plaid trousers.

There was a knock on the door. Weissman, who had been in telephone and radio communication with the guards and police, placed the receiver on the cradle and walked to the door. Ned stared out the window into the darkness—that was a good posture for effect. But the darkness turned the window into a mirror and Ned watched Weissman pat down his cowlick before opening the door. "One should always look *through* a window, not *at* a window," Ned's father had said. As Ned watched the door open, he added another sin to his list.

But I'm important now, Ned thought. I'm in New York, a city made of glass. And mirrors, he added as an afterthought. Here his sins would pile up faster. "A great man has more sins to repent for, more crimes to be forgiven, and a longer stay in Purgatory—if he does not go to Hell," his father had said one Passover when Snapover, the tailor, sat for dinner. After that, Ned had been quite sure that Snapover would certainly go to Hell.

Ned turned around to greet the guests that entered the room.

"Good evening, Ned," Doctor Kheal said. "I hope you've had a pleasant day." Doctor Kheal, a tall, skinny man in his early forties, had light brown hair that was beginning to turn grey and a smooth relaxed face. His green jacket with brown elbow patches was frayed at the cuffs and his black trousers had lost their crease. Ned noticed that he needed a shave.

"I'd like you to meet Miss Ingrid Oolan, who has been waiting quite some time to meet you. She's a parapsychologist from St. John's University." She had long black hair and pale, almost translucent skin. The delicate network of veins was clearly visible on her throat.

Is this just chance that she looks like Sandra? Ned asked himself. She wasn't wearing a bra, and Ned could see the outline of her nipples on her open collared shirt. Her black hair and dark skirt contrasted with her pale face and white shirt. She was a pen and ink drawing on white paper, Ned thought. But her features were different than Sandra's. Her lips were thin and her eyes were set a bit too close together, giving her the appearance of always staring. Ned wondered if she, too, had black fuzz around her nipples.

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"And this is Dr. Michael Taharahnugi," said Kheal. Taharahnugi, an albino black of medium build, stood beside Ingrid, his pale hand almost touching hers. His pink eyes were buried deeply into his square face, and he wore his kinky white hair long—it framed his face in a bleached halo. Ned guessed he was a sociologist, then reminded himself to stop sidestepping, lest "cause should be sundered from effect," as his father would probably say.

"And you know Dr. Ladislas, of course." Nicholas Ladislas was a sour looking man with a shock of white hair that was thinning in the back. His face was lined with wrinkles and his heavy lidded eyes never seemed to move. Ned didn't like him, and he connected the lines on his forehead into a z. A z that stands for Zorro, he thought, and then told himself to stop sidestepping. There were too many people in the room. He hoped they would leave soon—he was beginning to feel the effects of claustrophobia.

"And here's someone you haven't seen in some time," Kheal said.

It was Deaken. Ned had not recognized him. He was much thinner than Ned remembered, and his face was drawn, giving him an older appearance. He looked like a cadaver, Ned thought. His large, dark eyes were sinking into his face. Although his movements were shaky, he handled his cigarette with aplomb and brushed off the ash with his pinky finger.

No doubt he's ill, Ned thought. Could be a tumour of the gastrointestinal tract. Or Hodgkins Disease. It was probably Lymphosarcoma. Ned remembered a few of his father's homilies and forced himself to think along previously earmarked paths. He told himself that he had to stop wandering and sidestepping.

"I hope you have found New York interesting, Ned," Deaken said, using one cigarette to light another.

"You look different," Ned said.

"Do I? I don't feel any different. Well, it all worked out, didn't it? You're finally providing New York with its dreams."

"Yes, you certainly are," said Taharahnugi.

Ned was sure Taharahnugi was a sociologist.

"Everyone's been dreaming each other's dreams for a week," Kheal said. "The dreams ran in a sequence and we've just come to the end of it. I think we have enough information now. We've come to talk to you about your dreams."

"But it's not a week," Ned said. "I can't remember having any dreams until tonight."

"Well, that's news to me," Weissman said.

"Let's sit down," Ned said, motioning Ingrid Oolan to the couch near the bedroom door. He sat down between Ingrid and Kheal. Ladislas sat down on a soft chair beside Taharahnugi, who had claimed the antique rocker and was drumming his long fingers on the small endtable, while Deaken

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pulled one of the high backed chairs away from the dining table. They were mapping out a tight, defensible niche in the overlarge living room.

Ned let his hand slip from his lap until it touched Ingrid's leg. She tensed for a second, then moved toward Kheal and crossed her legs, showing off blue climbing veins that reached for her knees.

Weissman brought out drinks for everyone: a sherry for Ingrid and cognac for Kheal, bock beer in tall frosted glasses for Deaken and Ladislas, and soda water for Taharahnugi. Before retiring to the couch at the other end of the room, Weissman served Ned the last bottle of a particular Mexican beer that had a green tinge when held to the light. Ned loved it. Weissman had once tried it and suffered the next few hours with diarrhea.

"Tell us about your dream," Ladislas said, rubbing his eyes as if he would soon go to sleep.

Ingrid stretched her legs out and Kheal nodded to Ned. So Ned told them about the apparition in the mirrors and Donatello Toth (who could not be) and Junction and Goshen, where they all would meet.

They asked him questions and argued amongst themselves. But Ned felt himself losing the drift of their conversation. He tried to remain alert, but his head kept lolling forward, dipping into sleep. In his dreams the words would take on a life of their own. They became animated film characters running through their own pathos of life and death.

And Ned would awaken with a start, feeling fuzzy and warm, only to dream again of words and cartoon animals.

"Although our dreams were different than the boy's," Ladislas said as he scratched at the corner of his eye, "we all received the same directive to go to Goshen."

"And even if there is an alien presence, that would not necessarily mean that it had anything to do with the breakdown of our known continuum and laws," Taharahnugi said. When he wasn't talking, he would drum his fingers on the endtable.

"Yes, of course," Kheal said. "But I think the answers might as easily lie within ourselves. Everyone will agree, I think, that this is, at least in part, a psi phenomenon."

Ned fell asleep again and dreamed of Ingrid's blue veined legs. Words and letters acquired form and personality and passed before him. It was strange, he thought, that the others did not recognize this as another indeterminate period. Yet the presence of other people did not bother him as it had in the past.

He allowed himself to drift freely through the unformed potential, dimly realizing that he was holding the stuff of the room together.

But walls and doors could just as easily become trees and snow.

And trees and snow could easily become sand and stone.

Ned dreamed that he was lying in

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reddish-yellow desert sand. His crotch itched. A scorpion was making its way towards his extended arm, its feelers touching the ground, sensing and feeling movement that was miles away. It would crawl a few inches, curl up and wiggle its pincers, clean them with its lobster legs.

Ned could hear the creature whispering to him, but its comments were too simple to be understood. Ned found that his arm was pointed toward a church carved out of the soft, porous tuff of a stone cliff. He knew that he was seeing through the stone into its holy insides. He glimpsed the fresco secco portrait of Emperor Constintin Porphry Genetos in the narthex entrance hall and the chapels to the east and the ceiling domes resting on vertical cylinders of stone. And the fading frescoes on the walls and ceiling depicting scenes from the life of Christ. He remembered that around the Ninth century in Cappadocia, a province in central Turkey, monks had whittled God's stone into this church, cutting into the rock from above to reveal a church they would create inside.

From the outside, the spires, cones, pleats, and folds of rock were overpowering in their monochromatic contrast of white and black. They hid hundreds of God's monasteries and churches. Jutting into a pale, cloudless sky, they stood as a true synthesis of man's way and nature's display.

"Do you want another beer, Ned?" Weissman asked. "You'll have to take bock, we're out of the Mexican stuff."

Ned shook his head and tried to retrace the conversation. The change was over: Ned felt alert and restless. Ingrid was still sitting beside him, her legs crossed, right hand just touching Ned's leg.

"Yes, I agree," Ingrid said. "The fact that we all dreamed of that desert church is indicative of psi phenomena. And the religious symbolism corresponds with Ned's beliefs. In fact, the paintings on the walls looked very much like the sketches Ned had done for Doctor Court. Ned is quite talented; they could easily be dream paintings." She pressed her hand against Ned's leg.

"And all the figures Ned imagined in the Rorschachs had white haloes," Kheal said.

"I made them up," Ned said. "I didn't really see them in the ink splotch; I drew them in myself."

"Well, that's what you do with that kind of test," Ingrid said, patting his hand.

"No, it's different," Ned said, resting his knee against her leg. "All the other stuff I saw."

"But how could Ned know anything about the place we've been dreaming about?" Ladislas asked, resting his head on the back of his chair and staring at the wall from under half closed eyelids. "Goreme is in Turkey."

"I just dream it," Ned said.

They ignored him.

"Well, why couldn't he dream about Goreme?" asked Kheal.

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"Because Junction is isolated," Ladislas said. "It's surrounded by chaos, their conception of Hell. And who knows . . ."

"Goreme would have been in a library book," Ingrid said. "And Ned read everything he could find."

"Yes, Ladislas said, sitting up, "and he remembers all the titles he read, which is a considerable amount. He has a photographic memory, yet he did not remember anything that could even remotely tie in with Goreme. It seems that Junction has destroyed everything relating to Geography and world history, except for a few biblical accounts. Ned could not dream an exact duplicate of Goreme, detail by detail, by chance."

"Yes, he could," Deaken said. He sounded as if he was out of breath. "Since the world is becoming more indeterminate, the arbitrary distinctions of time are of no use. The only place they work is here, and only part of the time. So it is also with spatial relationships.

"What we simultaneously experience as space does not have to correspond with real space. Those portions of space simultaneously experienced are not necessarily always mapped into the equivalent geometer's space. And the simultaneously experienced portions of the geometer's space that overlap must merge. The overlaps will be used to insure reliable mapping, much the same way as it is done in aerial photography.

"But in aerial photography, when we have no overlaps, we use our imagination to fill in the gaps. That is our only available means of linkage. Mankind is split in time and space. It is through Ned that we have established contact with another community . . ."

"Aren't you forgetting about yourself?" Kheal asked. "You initiated the contact, remember that."

"And that contact," Deaken said, "provided enough overlap to remap the total experienced space-time manifold into the geometer's space-time manifold. And this is possible because time is not a progression or a simple line. It is a loop. The only way that I could reach Ned was by imagining the necessary overlap into the future. That's how I stepped into a possible future. The same holds true for the past, as witnessed by Ned's journey here."

"And what do you think will happen when all the overlaps merge, if they ever do?" asked Ladislas.

"I don't know," said Deaken, "but I think we will soon find out."

"Bullshit," Taharahnugi said. He stopped drumming on the table.

Ingrid's hand was actively pressing Ned's leg. Could I have dreamed this to happen before? Ned asked himself as he put his arm around Ingrid, resting his hand on her shoulder.

"No, I don't think it's bullshit," Kheal said. "Deaken did not exactly imagine his way to Junction. He dreamed it. And the way things are now, that's just as real."

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"Oh," Ladislas said. "Then you're dreaming me and everything else, and I'm dreaming you and everything else so cleverly that our dreams match."

"I didn't say that, but it's possible. An interesting solution."

"Then," Ladislas continued, "there might be an integrating force drawing us to Junction, dreaming us all."

"Your alien?" Kheal asked sarcastically.

"Well," Taharahnugi said, "given the rest, it follows. Admit it."

"It just doesn't feel right," Kheal said.

"And that," Ladislas said, "is a stupid statement."

"Hooray," said Ned. "Shit; let him intuit. That works as good as anything else. If that's what he's dreaming, then maybe he's making it real. Hell, how do you think I manage to oogle Ingrid, if not by fooling around with the stuff of change?"

"That's all been set up," Ingrid said. "We've all been dreaming about it for a week. All those moves have already been plotted."

"And we've been dreaming of going on a trip to Goshen-Goreme," Taharahnugi said. "Perhaps we'll find some answers there."

"Can we all be ready by tomorrow morning?" asked Kheal.

Ned knew the answers, saw the end of the dream; but they had dreamed different endings, so Ned played along. As they fussed over details, he nodded and pretended to pay attention and fondled Ingrid's leg. It didn't matter, he thought. Although Ned felt a compulsion not to drift away from the immediate present, he was becoming impatient. And Ladislas was talking too much.

"All right," Kheal said, "I guess that's about it."

Ned waited for the others to leave. Ingrid acted as hostess and escorted them to the door, laughing and promising to be ready in the morning.

"Well, are you coming?" she asked Ned as she stepped into the bedroom.

Ned followed, leaving Weissman in the living room to read his New York Times and smoke hand-rolled Cuban cigars, a commodity that had suddenly appeared on the market after the last change. Ned wondered if his noisy lovemaking would bother Weissman. Probably not, he thought. But Ned wheezed like a seal when he reached a climax.

Rationalizing his uncountable sins, Ned watched Ingrid in the full length mirror. He dreamed of all the hollows in her body where he could rest his face, all the fleshy handholds he could squeeze as he came.

"All we have to do is do it," she said as she combed her long black hair. "It's all been set up, we just follow along."

"Well," Ned said, "you do have a choice. You don't have to mimic your dreams."

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"No, I've made my choice. I agreed to it." She stared at herself in the mirror and unbuttoned her blouse.

"Well, I didn't," Ned said as he took a step toward the door.

As she took off her shirt, exposing her breasts fed by visible arteries, she smiled and said, "Wait a moment, Ned. As you will see, they do have hair around the nipples."

And a smile of even white teeth drew Ned back into the room.

VIII.

THE CROWDS filled the street and backed up against the windows of the plush Park Avenue shops. Fleeing from their dreams, they chanted and sang songs. They co-opted policemen, grey ladies with tiny clubs, and pompadoured boys to help them break through the many weak points of the police line. Secretaries in colored scarfs and office boys sporting sideburns and dirty shirts threw handfulls of confetti from skyscraper windows. Sparkles and streamers spun and danced their way to the street below. They would soon be swallowed up by sweeping machines intent on restoring the world to a sober grey.

Ned waved to the crowds from the back seat of a Cadillac limousine. He sat between Weissman and Bunker, a young detective with a pockmarked face and a swollen lower lip. Bunker's aloof style and quiet manners reminded Ned of the "cool fifties." Lately, Ned had found it easier to remember details of a past he had never experienced.

"Sit back in the seat," Weissman said.

Ned settled back into the cushioned seat for a few seconds and then sat up to watch a girl climb onto the hood of the car. Facing the windshield, she straddled the silver hood ornament. Long blond hair covered her shoulders and part of her thin face. She wore a loose dress, and Ned could see her tiny breasts jiggle with each movement of her arms.

"How the Hell did she get up there?" Weissman asked. Bunker, of course, would not answer. He pleated the fabric of his trousers and sucked in his cheeks.

"Ned. Ned. Get out of bed," she screamed as she pounded on the windshield with red fists. Two policemen with red armbands pulled her off the hood and were swallowed by the crowd.

Ned thought he heard her scream, "Ned. Ned. I want to love you before you're dead." He looked around at the crowds he passed. Faces focused for an instant. Everyone was shouting with the girl's voice, singing her songs.

"Ned. Ned. Ned. We want to love you."

"Before you're dead."

"Dead Ned."

Boys with painted faces sang contralto. Someone thudded against the car and rolled under the tires, giving himself for his faith. Ned watched his proselytes disrobe

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as he passed. A wave of his hand and new faces appeared out of a pastel fog of confetti.

"Christ is here and Ned is his prophet," shouted a curly haired boy in a white robe. He prostrated himself in the road. Ned felt the car lurch as it crushed the boy's chest. The crowd was singing. A policeman with his cap cocked over his left eye gave him the finger. A blond girl cupped her breasts for him. Onanists lined the street.

Ned prayed that this would not become a difficult indeterminate period. He could not suffer a change now, not with these thousands of people threatening to crush him inside the soft interior of the car.

A rock bounced off the unbreakable windshield. A pistol was fired twice. Screams, laughter, more confetti snow for the departing hero. Ned sat up straight in the car, braced himself, played his role, and waved with an open hand, fingers aflutter. A perfumed silk handkerchief would complete the tableau, he thought.

"Alright, Ned," Weissman said. "That's enough. Stop waving. I'm tired of your hand fluttering in front of my face."

"But that's what they want," Ned said.

"I don't care."

Ned stopped waving and the crowds pushed past the police lines to converge on the car. They beat their fists against the windows, slashed the tires, crawled over the hood, and some were crushed as the car slowed to a halt. Screaming for Ned and God and a new order, they rocked the car, picked it up and dropped it. And then picked it up again. Ned was thrown against Weissman, who was swearing with his best Brooklyn accent. Regaining his balance, Ned readied himself for the next shock.

The crowd paused, like a weightlifter slowly inhaling and curling stiff fingers around a steel bar, and flexed its muscles by throwing the car on its side.

"Sonovabitch," Weissman screamed, as Ned and Bunker squeezed him against the door. Ned banged his knee on the floorboard trying to move out of Bunker's way.

The window shattered. Shards of green tinged glass were followed by long fingers and fists. Bunker fired several shots, and a skinny girl fell through the window. She smelled of perfume and sweat. As Bunker pushed the girl out of his way, a man in a green suit crawled through the window and grabbed his arm.

"Get out of the way, Ned," Weissman said, pointing his pistol at the man in the suit.

Well, fire, Ned said to himself, feeling another change coming on. The girl beside him moaned. Her arm flopped behind her head which was wedged against Ned's knee.

"Mother of God," Bunker screamed as he was pulled out of the car by his hair. Weissman fired into the window, but there were more people than bullets.

"God is the mother of Ned," the girl whispered. Her left eye fell

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open.

"Get Ned," screamed the crowd.

Weissman pulled Ned under him, straddled his head with his legs, protected him with his muscle-bound body. Ned thought he could hear Bunker screaming as he was swallowed by the crowd. He sidestepped and watched an old lady pinch Bunker's cheeks, then stick her fingers in his eyes.

"We love you Ned. We love you," the crowd screamed with one voice.

Weissman screamed as his ear was torn off.

"Save the world for mankind."

"God is the mother of Ned."

And a dissenting voice. "Fuck you."

Ned was aware of the exploding CS and CN tear gas grenades. But it took such a long time for a second to pass. A fog machine belched HC smoke. Cannisters of Nausea gas and Blister gas exploded into the crowd. Finally a propellent cannister of mace was shot into the car by a giggling policeman.

The policeman was quickly replaced, but not before the cannister exploded, filling the car with smoke. Ned choked, still remembering the pungent odor of Weissman's crotch.

Ned coughed and arms reached into the car to pull him out. He was passed among the crowd, worshipped and beaten. Ned smelled the rubber of a gas mask being fitted over his face. He gagged and remembered the subway station, its noises and people with their pushing arms and fetid breath and sweat-clogged clothes.

"Don't kill Ned," they shouted. "Love him. God is his mother. Mother of God."

Ned vomited, but the reluctant police were a wall around him. They tried not to become part of the crowd. They screamed for his blood, but held on to their sanity.

Ned listened to the shots being fired. He sidestepped and slowed down the bullets so he could watch them. A few screams, a few deaths, and Ned was still protected. He pulled at his mask and tried not to think about Weissman as everything went white before him.

"Don't protect me," he screamed. "I want to do it." But it wasn't much of a feat, since he was so close to the Pan American Building.

THE ELEVATOR DOORS opened and Ned found himself on the roof of the building. Standing on this concrete shelf, he could look down on the smaller spires of the city, a pincushion carpet of steel and cement. But the helioport was smaller than he expected. The clarity and fullness of Ned's memory overshadowed the prosaic immediate reality. Ned had stopped worrying about sidestepping into a past he had not experienced. He wandered into the past and future for diversion or information.

His party was already in the Vertol Helicopter. Ned knew that the helicopter was turbine powered—whatever that was; he

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did not care to search his memory just now—a commercial version of the U.S. Army YHC-1. Although it was ungainly on the ground (how could such a pregnant fuselage by supported by those frail rotor arms?), Ned thought it was beautiful. Its six tiny portholes reminded him of sailing ships he had never seen. And it was painted white, the color of Heaven and virtue.

But would the air in Heaven hold them up? Ned asked himself, hoping that God would provide an answer. The sky was grey, filled with pollutants. But he didn't have to worry yet: he was still a safe distance from Heaven.

The pilot hurried him into the copter. Ingrid waved as he entered, and he sat down beside her. Ned remembered that she had left his bed at four o'clock this morning. Too tired to start an argument, he had feigned sleep.

"How are you, Ned?" she asked, as he sat down. Taharahnugi, who was sitting across the aisle with Kheal, frowned and adjusted his seat to a reclining position. "Aren't you a bit frightened?" she asked in a condescending tone. "I certainly am."

Ned nodded his head and let his hand slide to her leg. She crossed her legs and huddled close to the window. Ned left his hand where it was, deciding what to do next.

"I wanted to have a chance to talk with you," she said, moving slightly closer to him, but watching his hand. "I've been very interested in your dreams—the ones you didn't share with the rest of us."

"Why?" Ned asked.

"Because I feel that they might be a key to this puzzle."

Ned sidestepped, searched into the future, enjoyed a lapse into the past—Ingrid looked beautiful when she made love, especially when she came—and said, "They're not important. They're only distortions of my fears and have no relevance to this trip."

"Well, why don't you let me be the judge of that?"

Ned leaned toward her and whispered, "Why did you leave so early? You had more time to stay. We could have made love again."

"I beg your pardon. I don't know what you're insinuating, and I don't like the way you're talking to me. I'm not one of your Junction sluts. You've been dreaming too much."

"You seemed to enjoy it at the time. And I didn't dream this," Ned said, squeezing her breast. He could feel the padding of her brassiere.

She bit her lip and slapped him squarely on the mouth with her open hand. "You awkward, boorish, sonovabitch," she said, adjusting her bra.

And with that the engines started. A "Fasten Your Seatbelt, No Smoking" sign blinked on over the aisle and the pilot checked everyone to make sure the seatbelts were fastened tightly. As the pilot walked to the forward compartment, Ned noticed that he had a slight limp.

Ned listened to the rotors cutting

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the air with a whooshing sound, like a scythe cutting grass. Ned liked the rhythm and followed it as it gained momentum. As the helicopter lifted, Ned leaned his head back against the seat rest and closed his eyes. He let himself be sucked into the machinery of God, concentrated on the whirring of cogs and blades. But even with his eyes closed he could see Taharahnugi's smiling face. And Kheal's close beside it. Ned dreaded a long interminate change, but it passed quickly and he awoke with a start.

"Sorry," he said to Ingrid after jarring her elbow. She nodded, gave him a wan smile, and returned her stare to the porthole.

They were over urban area. Grey buildings jutted into a grey sky, reaching for, but never skewing, the grey wafer clouds that drifted by. The clouds above were a worn insulation for the city, a sham protection from the unformed potential that was engulfing previous reality.

In another future, Ned thought, New York would be only a part of the Bos-Wash Corridor, one of the pincers of urban drift. But that was not for this future. Soon, he would see Tarrytown in the distance and the first mimicries of open country. But Ned felt that something was wrong. He turned his gaze from the porthole and leaned toward the aisle, away from Ingrid's tightly laid out psychological space.

"Well, then what do you believe?" Kheal asked Taharahnugi. Ladislas, who was sitting with Deaken behind Ned and Ingrid, leaned forward in his seat and looked very interested.

"I believe in 'Dreamin'," said Taharahnugi. "That's an aborigine expression that refers back to the 'Dream Time' of the past in which the 'Earth Mother Goddess' and the 'Rainbow Serpent' were created. Created out of dreams. The Rainbow Serpent made 'The Road' and the Earth Mother brought everything else into existence. Does that satisfy your need to know?" He smiled and stared at the ceiling.

Ladislas shook his head and muttered to himself, but Deaken only smiled and said, "That's very interesting. Perhaps the Rainbow Serpent symbolizes time and the Earth Mother Goddess space. Then your Dream Time might be similar to a collective unconscious in which past, present, and future exist in simultaneous potentiality. We are not so removed, after all."

Taharahnugi chuckled and folded his large hands on his lap.

"Perhaps we are on the road right now," Kheal said.

"Look out your porthole," Ingrid said. "Something looks wrong out there. How long have we been traveling, anyway? This trip should only take twenty minutes, more or less."

"Well, we haven't even been in the air five minutes," Deaken said.

"What?" said Ladislas. "We've been flying for at least a half hour."

"No we haven't," said Ned. "But we haven't been flying for any five

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minutes either."

"And so it starts," Taharahnugi said. "Remember, no one else has ever returned."

"Shut up," said Ladislas.

There was not a cloud in the robin egg sky. As Ned looked past Ingrid's hardened face and out the porthole, he could not find where the sky ended. It had swallowed up the ground below.

Now Ned realized what had been bothering him before: the skyscrapers and four lane highways and rivers and hills and grasslands and towns had not been believable. Their reality had been so diluted that they became illusions. But it was a gradual process.

No one could have survived in the towns they had left behind—they were just palimpsests to be erased. Real flesh would have whithered and the countryside could only become a painter's wash on a blank, white canvass. And now, Ned thought, everything was erased. Natural law had fallen apart behind him. Chaos was, for the time being, blue. But blue was as good a color for the stuff of the universe as any, Ned thought.

As the engines sputtered and the rotors lost momentum, the plastic blue potential for a new cosmos congealed around the helicopter. It slowed the blades to a halt. The copter was stuck in the sky, like a fly in amber.

"What the Hell is this?" Ladislas shouted, his sleepy eyes wide open.

"That's it," said Taharahnugi. "It's Hell, the pit, the serpent's livingroom." He began to laugh hysterically and then screamed. "We're with the snake in the belly of The Mother. The snake will wrap itself around us until we can't see."

"Quiet him down," said Deaken, but Taharahnugi shook his head at Kheal and ran to the forward compartment.

"Open the door," he shouted, banging it with his fists.

"Well, something's wrong," said Ladislas. "Why doesn't the pilot answer? And why doesn't he come out of his cabin?"

"Because he probably doesn't want to be attacked by a lunatic," Deaken said.

"He can't just stay in there and do nothing. Why didn't he say anything to us?" And with that Ladislas got up and helped Taharahnugi kick the cabin door open. The others just watched.

And finally the door gave way. But there was no pilot or forward compartment. Only blue sky pushing into the doorway. Taharahnugi screamed and tried to jump, but Ladislas grabbed him, pushed him out of the way, and kicked the door closed.

Ladislas ran down the aisle away from the door screaming, "Help, I'm falling." Taharahnugi lay unconscious against the raised seat platform. Deaken made sure that Taharahnugi was all right while Kheal tried to quiet Ladislas. Ingrid stared calmly out the porthole.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Kheal.

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"I don't know," said Ingrid.

As she spoke, the outside blue turned to grey. Ned could almost make out the slight definitions which could mean hills and sand and artifacts.

"Look," Kheal said to Ladislas, who had begun to scream again. "Something's happening out there."

"I don't want to see it," Ladislas said.

"Are we making that happen?" asked Deaken, leaving Taharahnugi to sleep in the aisle.

"Yes, I think so," said Kheal. "That's real; soon it will set. But is this Goshen?"

"How do you know what's real?" asked Ladislas. "Are you still intuiting?" He laughed in a high pitched voide, an operatic mockery.

"No," Taharahnugi whispered, "this isn't Goshen. This is the road and that, that is the Earth Mother." He yawned and mumbled in his sleep.

The helicopter shuddered and a buzzing sound swept through the fuselage. This illusion of shaking was only a manifestation and magnification of their fears. And without being told they all seemed to realize it. Ned knew that the copter was at rest forever.

"Just another illusion," Taharahnugi mumbled and then chuckled. He was having a fitful sleep.

"Spatially, perhaps, we may be in the vicinity of Goshen, but that's quite meaningless now," Kheal said.

Growing impatient, Ned closed his eyes and dreamed. The desert spread out around him, silently sucking the life out of the soil and warm creatures and replacing them with reddish-yellow sand and soft tuff. The spires, overhangs, and cut cones of rock were overpowering in their monochromatic contrast of light and shadow. Rough hewn cathedrals jutted into a pale, cloudless sky. A breeze pushed the sand into waves and bit microscopic pieces out of the rocks that would soon become reddish-yellow sand again.

And the others watched the plastic coated walls of the helicopter melt into the sand and rock around them. Taharahnugi was still asleep and started to snore. Ned found himself lying in the desert sand. His crotch itched. A scorpion was making its way towards his extended arm, its feelers touching the ground, sensing and feeling movement that was miles away. It would crawl a few inches, curl up and wiggle its pincers, clean them with its lobster legs.

Ned could hear the scorpion whispering to him, but its comments were too simple to be understood. But as it came closer, the creature's thoughts became stronger and Ned sidestepped and compensated for its lack of intelligence.

"You would do better in the shade," it said. "There, in the temple where your arm points."

"Why can you talk?" asked Ned, sifting the coarse sand through his fingers, then scooping out another

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handfull.

"Because I am conscious, as is everything hereabouts. You're supplying the words and conceptions; I'm just communicating a sensation, and a simple sensation at that."

Ned watched its slow, agonized movements towards his outstretched arm. Ned was wary of the euphoric feeling that was beginning to come over him. It dulled him, made him wish for Hilda and Sandra and, perhaps, Ingrid and great chunks of green tinged glass.

"Of course," the creature said, "if you don't move I will poison you."

The scorpion was only a few inches away from Ned's fingers. Ned curled them into a fist, hoping to gain time. He was sluggish and could feel the energy being sucked out of him. And he thought he could hear himself snore.

Ned sensed the infinity of sand around him. It seemed to whisper as it covered him. The sky was a blue ceramic bowl with a cloud pasted inside for effect. Slowly it was flattening out; soon to crush him into glass.

The sky hummed. Ned did not listen to what it was saying. There was no time: the vainglorious scorpion was hoping to deliver death, or at least a respectable sickness. With a supreme effort of will, Ned pulled his arm to his chest and stood up. He was dizzy, as if his head was filled with water sloshing from side to side.

His thoughts were jumbled into the desert sounds. Everything was whispering, whistling, and humming. He listened to the broken syllables and almost words. The scorpion inched past Ned's foot, but Ned was too far above to understand its simple cursing.

I don't see a temple, Ned thought, secretly addressing the scorpion, who was burrowing his way into the sand.

"Go straight ahead, in the direction of your face," said a voice inside Ned's head.

"What about the others?" Ned stood motionless, waiting for a reply.

"Forget them for now," the voice said. "You'll know what they're doing."

Was this a directive from an outside source? Ned asked himself. Or was it his own intuition? Unable to find the scorpion, Ned walked on. The sand sucked on his feet, trying to bury them. Each step was an attack on the sand and a retreat from its grasp.

As he quickened his pace, the desert noises became louder. The sky hummed. The sand whispered, occasionally finding its voice and drawling out a few syllables. And the air gave him enough space to walk in. Soon the smooth waves of sand would give way to rougher ground enclosed in a crown of stone spires and cliffs.

"It's both," said the voice inside Ned's head.

"What?" asked Ned.

"This voice inside your head constitutes both your own intuition

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and an outside intelligence. One nudges the other. You know: feedback. A cozy synthesis."

"What are you?" asked Ned, once more feeling his energy being sucked away. He imagined that he was falling to his knees in the hot red sand.

"I'm more than the scorpion and the sand sucking on your feet. But I'm just a part of the whole thing."

"Shit," said Ned.

"Now you sound like Taharahnugi." The sand whispered "haha," each tiny grain adding its own measure of mirth, as the wind ran its fingers toward the east.

"How do you know about Taharahnugi?"

"The same way you do," said the voice. "I know everything that you know, or could know if you looked. And I know what you're in the process of learning."

"And what's that?" asked Ned. He focused his eyes on the brown bumps in the horizon that would soon become hills and cliffs.

"That everything here is conscious: the sand, sun, animate creatures, and, as you will soon see, the rocks and hills ahead. In this closed system every element is in perfect empathy with every other element, each one seeing, feeling, and suffering for the rest. We are the unformed potential you first talked about with Deaken, who, incidentally, is dead now. Died of lymphosarcoma.

"But we are self ordering. A mind or ordering principle, if you like, that has formed itself out of its own potential. We are taking the natural direction of matter. Entropy is only an aberration. Soon the entire cosmos will become conscious. We will organize time for our advantage."

Ned found himself stepping over rocks. The voice had become a buzz and would not answer his questions. Making his way into the rough Turkish hinterland (that hadn't been there before), Ned could make out the cliffs ahead. They jutted into the pale, cloudless sky to form a roughly hewn crown. Natural shapes for God's church, Ned thought. An object lesson in perfection.

As Ned gained the top of a ridge, a field of hundreds of rock cones opened up to view. He could not see an end to them. They looked like the tents of a vast desert army, each one casting a flat, black shadow on the level ground. But they were only a prelude to the skyscraper cliffs ahead.

Ned stopped to dry heave. He gagged on his tongue and pressed his palms against his wet forehead. As his eyes unfocused, the landscape became a smear of charcoal and umber. His body needed food, drink, and rest. Ned would appease it with sleep.

"The peasants used to call these cones *peri bacalari,* or fairy chimneys," the voice said, leading him into a deeper level of sleep. "According to many myths in the region of Urgup, they are inhabited by harmful spirits which must not be disturbed. Like the shapes of all

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rocks and clouds, the legend-making powers of the cones are limitless."

"Where are the peasants now?" Ned asked as he turned over on his side to stop snoring.

"They're all dead. But we've integrated them into the system. The universe is a collector and conservator of souls, not mechanical energy, as was once supposed. Look around you. Conscious souls are breaking away. They're growing lighter and stretching into the sky."

Ned watched the ghosts cavorting from cone to cone before they rose into the blue sky and disappeared into Heaven. Some were transparent specters, others were full bodied, complete with hair and rouged cheeks.

"The transparent ones will rise first," the voice said. "See?"

"But the others are human," Ned said, his eyes moving back and forth to follow the dream.

"Yes, of course," said the voice. "The monsters are still inside the cones, soon to be belched out and integrated with the rest. They are the local gods, still hoping to be recreated and worshiped by surviving natives. But they confuse ghosts with flesh. So they've been dying for quite a while."

The voice guided Ned across the conefield. It directed him over the ghost laden rocks and around the well worn cones. Guided by his sleepwalker's intuition, Ned investigated his dream images with fascination. He watched the ghosts rising into Heaven, each adding its bit of consciousness to the stuff of the universe, and waited for the gods resting inside the earth.

Ghosts with long noses and thin lips reached out to him. They spoke softly inside his head, invaded his private thoughts, rested in his memories. Transparent specters drifted around him, passed through his skin on their way to Heaven.

"They are pure life energy," the voice said. "Each one is etched into reality."

"But you're losing them," Ned said. "They're floating away."

And a chorus of voices shouted inside Ned's head. Each voice was that of a ghost. They laughed and giggled, held conversation, and filled Ned with new languages and thoughts, new songs and sensations. They proved their reality by inhabiting him.

Ned listened for the voice that had guided him here, but it was silent.

"You don't need that voice anymore," said a ghost who was losing his hair.

"We'll show you around now," said a specter that could barely be seen. He spoke in Kazan Tatar, a Turkish dialect, which Ned could now understand.

"We're not lost," said a ghost that had once been a peasant girl. Her face was smooth except for brown sacs of skin that hung under her deep set black eyes. She had been dead for a long time, for she spoke Old Turkish.

"We're just passing away," said

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another ghost that seemed to be growing out of the peasant girl's stomach. "We are passing from one state to another, converging into a small number of very complex groupings. Breaking away from the slavery of large numbers."

"You see," said the specter that spoke Kazan Tatar, "we're deepening our consciousness by losing ourselves."

"And he's well on the way," said the ghost who was losing his hair. "I can hardly see him. But what about you?"

"We can certainly see you," said the peasant girl. The ghost growing out of her stomach was giggling.

"You're better off than the monsters below you," said the ghost, trying to extricate himself from the peasant girl. "But Ned, Ned, you're not dead."

The chorus took it up. "Ned, Ned, you're not dead."

Ned stopped snoring, began to climb out of the upper dungeons of sleep.

"Do you know where you're going, Ned?" they asked. "You're passing away, too. Running just ahead of the monsters trying to break out of the ground. But your skin's too tight. Loosen it. Die a little."

Ned broke into consciousness with a howl. The ghosts ignored him and went about their business of ascending into Heaven. Ned pressed his hands against his face and listened to his fingers break. He felt for his flesh, which would soon dissolve, layer by layer.

IX.

THE CONE FIELD with its thousands of fingers protruding from the ground was behind Ned. Everything was quiet except for the wind which screamed as it pushed itself into the crown of cliffs ahead. Working his way up another hill, Ned listened for voices, but could only hear the crack of his eardrums as the air pressure changed.

As he neared the minarets and jagged cliffs of stone, Ned could distinguish the hermitages, monastic complexes, and churches from the natural lines of the rock. To his left, thirty feet up a smooth rock face, was a small opening. But the pulley ropes were rotted, and the monksbasket had long since been swallowed by the sand. That church must have had other sources of light, Ned thought, scanning the rock for other openings.

He felt himself being drawn toward a stone fist that stood sixty feet high. A foot wide staircase hewn out of the rock led into a large opening.

Ned stepped up the stairs and paused in the narthex entrance. Desert light streamed through the opening and illuminated the entire church. Ned recognized the fresco secco portrait of the Emperor Genetos to his left: it was just as he had dreamed it.

It had probably taken a single carver-architect about a month to chisel out this three thousand foot room, Ned thought as he looked into the church. The structure had

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stood before the carver began, implied in the soft tuff. He was only a tool used to coax and torture the rock into a work of art.

The plan of the church was a cross enclosed in a square with a principal dome over the crossing and four subsidiary domes over the four corners. But carefree deviations were to be found everywhere: Cupolas bubbled from flat ceilings, wall lines sagged, one half an arch didn't quite match the other. Loads and thrusts were negligible. The architect was free to work out his own structural symbols with little concern for structural safety.

Intrigued by the paintings and designs that covered the walls and ceiling, Ned walked into the church. The Pantocrator, represented by Christ, dominated everything from his position in the central dome. The celestial hierarchy was painted on the ceiling and upper walls. In the pendentives were the four evangelists. The eastern apse contained the Virgin Mary, and all the vaults and arches had a scene or saintly personage assigned to them. The lower portions of the walls were devoted to terrestrial events and people: martyrs, church dignitaries, and especially venerated saints. And for the faithful, now dead, the Last Judgment was painted in dramatic detail on the back wall. However, most of the paintings and designs were faded or marred by fissures in the stone.

"So it all comes back to this," said a voice inside Ned's head. "Look for me. I'm here."

Ned scanned the walls and ceiling.

"The arch. Right above you."

And Ned found a faded fresco of a middle-aged man dressed in a grey suit and blue tie, holding a crumpled fedora in his hand. His face was strong, only softened by a curly red beard. He talked, but his lips were not synchronized with the words inside Ned's head.

"I'll speak to you this time," he said, his lips forming a stylized smile. A piece of his face fell off as he talked.

"Were there other times?" Ned asked.

"Yes. Many other times. They're all passing by right now."

"Who are you?"

"Right now I'm a plaster metaphor for Ahasuerus the Jew, who shouldn't even be here. But I think it's a nice touch. What I really represent looks more like this . . ."

Ned felt himself turning over in his sleep. He looked around the church, found that it was held together by the things growing inside. Deities and saints smiled at him.

And a soft, thin tentacle curled around his leg.

"Don't be afraid," said Ahasuerus. "That's only to secure you for the moment."

"Moment?"

"As long as you like. Now follow the other tentacles outside. You can see them probing, growing, closing synapses."

Ned felt a tentacle take his hand

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and another wrap itself around his neck.

"We now inhabit the whole continuum of psychological space. Each tentacle reaches into another reality, another dream state."

Ned started to gag, but his tongue was between his teeth.

"Don't worry," Ahasauerus said. "We're holding you tight. You've just sunk inside reality. It's much thicker than the diluted stuff you're used to. Here dreams merge together, and those entities which are too simple to dream are included in the background. They complete the picture because they are cosmic extensions of man's consciousness."

"I'm drowning," Ned said, spitting up phlegm and clenching his fists.

"No, you're not," said Ahasauerus. "You're dreaming for everyone. And we're linking up humanity's dreams to spread an organized web of thought over the world's surface. So idea encounters idea. Your ideas. You're a contributer."

"But why me and Ladislas and Taharahnugi and Kheal? And where are they now?"

Ahasauerus laughed and was joined by the four evangelists. The Virgin waved from the eastern apse to the Christ in the central dome. The martyrs, church dignitaries, and venerated saints were chattering among themselves.

"It doesn't matter," Ahasauerus said. "Anybody could replace you. And everyone does. That's where the rest of your friends are: standing here. Dreaming you as you dream them. New York and Junction are only extensions of you. And you're only extensions of them. We all participate together. We all dream together.

"We're not only adding another layer of thought to the world, but we're becoming enclosed in our own thinking envelope. Billions of ideas—like dust-motes in clear light, shifting, interacting, organizing into ever more complex patterns—are coalescing into one single, vast mote of thought. Individuals grouping themselves together, sharing each other's thoughts, perform a single act of reflection. It is a single occurance. So it doesn't matter who's here. Everyone is only a component of the other."

"Then who are you?" Ned asked, imagining that the minions of humanity were choking him, crowding him into a space that didn't fit.

"Just an instigator. Pushing matter into its natural direction. Matching your dreams to theirs. (Ladislas was right about that.) But it's only a ruse that I'm painted on the wall, and we're doing it for you. You could have done it yourself. In fact, you had a good start. But now you face unity. Only by abandoning your egos can you subsist. Everything must pass away except consciousness. Instead of bequeathing your ideas, discoveries, works of art, you must deliver yourselves, your consciousness, to the collectivity."

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"No," Ned mumbled, trying to wrest his arm away from a tentacle. Other tentacles curled around his arms and legs. Ned dreamed of Hilda and Sandra, their puckered faces and loose skin, their high pitched voices and clawing nails. Each soul locked in flesh. Flesh to knead and squeeze and enter. Soft parts to push against. Single entities. Fitted tools.

"I'm thirsty," Ned said, his swollen tongue scratching against the roof of his mouth. He opened his mouth to breathe and a tentacle slid down his throat to suck his insides away.

"Don't worry," Ahasauerus said. "It will go away. Dream about water for the time being. Ascend to Heaven.

"As I was saying, your purpose, and the purpose of all life, is to become an original center, a focus for the universe. Each center is a unique self, a personality. A conscious universe must be able to integrate each distinct consciousness, as well as all consciousness, within itself. There is no loss. Every consciousness is still conscious of itself. Each consciousness becomes more distinctly itself and more clearly distinct from all the others.

"And it should not be surprising that some greater soul might be evolving into a soul of souls. If millions of cells in a single brain can cooperate to produce *mind*, then it is plausible that humanity might cooperate to determine something greater than itself.

"Granted, the universe cheated a bit by going indeterminate here. But impatience is universal. Life needed a catalyst. It's only chance, of course. What difference is a few billion years?"

Ned began to sense everyone else's dreams. They were all here, packed into this place, squeezing Ned out, suffocating him.

"And you're the soul of souls," Ned said, trying to sneer. He tried to break free from the tentacles, but they shrank to choke him.

Ahasauerus smiled. "I'm just a fading paint job." And to prove his point, the stone crumbled, leaving only his face and fedora. His mouth and nose were rapidly disappearing. His eyes were cracks in the soft tuff.

The church was filled with dreamers, each one asserting his own presence. Ned recognized most of them: faces from all the crowds he had ever seen, ghosts with long noses and thin lips, memories from books and Junction, and doctors and nurses and Baldanger. And Snapover, the tailor.

Ned screamed as the scavengers carefully picked him apart to taste his experiences. He tried to conceal his dreams from them, tried not to remember the taste of Hilda, the gaunt face of his father. But they were now universal experience.

"I'm still here," Ahasuerus said. "We'll disappear together."

"I need more space," Ned said. "They're pushing inside me. Too much weight." A ghost passed out of his mouth and hovered above him, pinching its nose.

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"Well, let them in," said Ahasuerus. "Give yourself up. The universe has taken your form. It has personified itself. There's no room for repulsion. The universe is converging on itself: the energies of attraction between human molecules are no longer dormant."

"They're taking off my arms," Ned screamed.

"Let them in," said Ahasuerus.

Another scream as they pulled Ned out of his flesh.

And Ned dreamed them all and watched all the possibilities simultaneously. He had a choice of eyes and minds and personalities. Hilda would be fun. Sandra danced out of view. His father was ill.

"Let's go," said Ahasuerus, and the arch crumbled.

X.

NED SQUEEZED OUT of the church. Light exuded through his pores, followed by sweat and desert grime. He could hear Ahasuerus chuckle inside his head.

"I hope that's just an affectation," Ahasuerus said.

"Are the rest here, too?" Ned asked.

"Yes," said Ahasuerus. "Everyone is locked in your head and vice versa. They're all there. Instant communication. Just float along."

"What's vice versa?"

"No need to ask any more," said Ahasuerus. "Sidestep. We'll hold you up. Fall down. We're all here."

Voices chanted inside his head. Ned could hear Hilda shouting above them all. And there was Baldanger's toothless whistle. Faces flashed before him, and he turned a corner.

And passed the old Desert Midland Bank. The glass had been repaired, and it was no longer a church. Customers in suits and matching hats were walking in and out clenching checkbooks and brown envelopes. Although things had changed, Ned knew where he was. Houses and shops would be scattered along the route downtown, clumped together to form subsections of the central village, their tidy roofs sloping toward the road and crowned with chimney pots in which birds built their nests.

Behind him was the park with its hangman's tree and assortment of wooden stocks and whipping posts. But it was summer vacation and the children had taken it over with their games and carbonated sodas. Grass had been swept away for a baseball diamond. The swimming pool pumps gurgled. Steel swings and curlicue slides glinted in the yellow sun. Basketballs bounced on cement.

Ned passed a skyscraper. Another effect, Ned thought. But whose? The Congress Bar was doing a Saturday afternoon business. The girls hooted at him and the men smiled. But where were Hilda and Sandra and Baldanger? And Reverend Surface was usually sniffing around this area at noontime.

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"I'm sleeping," said a voice inside Ned's head.

"That was Reverend Surface," said Ahasuerus.

Ned noticed that the road was now paved with tar instead of cobblestones. Garbage cans neatly lined the street. All the shops were open, selling wares from New York and Goshen. Selling swimming pools and cameras and radios and televisions and cultivated hash and grain whiskey.

"Where's Hilda?" Ned asked.

"Find out for yourself," said Ahasuerus. "You're too lazy."

"And where's Sandra?"

"Just keep walking."

"That's Sandra," said Ahasuerus. "Now leave me alone. I'm sleeping.

Ned found downtown Main Street crowded with celebrants. Dressed in Sunday best, curteous to one another, singing, laughing, giggling, they all walked to church or a bar or a lover or favorite whore. Men lifted their caps to the ladies. They all wore the neatly powdered look of celebration and humility.

"You're *my* favorite whore," said a woman's voice inside his head. It did not sound like Sandra, Ned thought. Ahasuerus was snoring.

"Who are you?" Ned asked.

"Ingrid."

Ned blocked the thought for the moment. He found Taharahnugi sitting naked on a stoop in front of a barber shop.

"I like the way the barber pole twirls around," Taharahnugi said. "I also like your halo. It fits your image. You know, young boy with strong cock who loves the world. Sandra will be right out. She went to get me some holy water."

"For what?" Ned asked. He noticed the fine scars that covered Taharahnugi's shoulders.

"So I can bring strength to the weak. Watch."

An old man with jowls and a silver rim of hair around his freckled head kneeled before Taharahnugi and begged forgiveness.

"See?" asked Taharahnugi. "Right off the street. Just like that. Where's the holy water?" he shouted.

"Right here," said Sandra, stepping out of the barber shop. She held a large glass pitcher against her chest and pulled her wet slip away from her crotch.

"You're spilling it," Taharahnugi said, as he reached out and took the pitcher. He shook some water over the old man's head and said, "Yes, you are forgiven."

"Hello, Ned," Sandra said. She kissed him and slid her pinky finger inside his shirt. "Don't be possessive. He's a sociologist."

Ned didn't restrain himself from hugging her and sneaking a feel.

"You don't have to sneak," Sandra said.

The old man thanked Taharahnugi, stood up, and kissed Sandra on the forehead. She giggled when he tried to maneuver his hand up her slip.

"Don't even think about it," Sandra said to Ned. "I'm very busy for the afternoon. Bringing strength

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to the weak. Let's do it later at the Congress. For old times."

"Do you want forgiveness?" asked Taharahnugi. He rolled his eyes and winked.

"Where's Deaken?" asked Ned.

"He's dying," said Taharahnugi, splashing water in Ned's face.

"And Kheal?"

"I'm in the Congress." It was Kheal's voice.

"That's him," said Ahasuerus between snores. "He's in your head."

"You were in too much of a hurry," said Kheal. "You passed us right by. Ladislas and I are having a party with Hilda. Very nice. But what were you looking for?"

"He's baiting you," said Taharahnugi.

"You're still my whore," said another voice inside Ned's head.

"That's who you're looking for," said Sandra. "Very nice."

Ned watched Ingrid cross the street. She wore a brown business suit and matching yellow bracelets on both arms.

"This is, of course, only one possibility," she said, slipping her hand into Ned's. She smiled at Sandra and Taharahnugi. "What do you want to do with it?"

Baldanger, dressed in a suit and open collared shirt, ran past them and shouted, "Hey, Ned. See you later at the Congress. Big party."

"I'm doing it," Ned said to Ingrid as they walked down the street. "I'm very comfortable right now. Right here."

"Comfortable?"

Ned noticed a few more skyscrapers and another Desert Midland Bank. He could hear factory bells. Business people nodded as they passed.

Ned held a short conversation with Deaken and began to feel tired again. "I'm tired," he said, looking up at the blue sky that always threatened to drop. He laughed and winked at it. Taharahnugi approved.

"But you've got responsibilities now," Ingrid said. "Hell is no longer an unformed plenum. It's a city. Look." And a thousand modern buildings burst out of the ground to form a new horizon. "There are freeways and subways and spaceports and people to be governed and laws to be made. And you're the President. It's your job."

"Not any more," Ned said, looking down at the street.

"I'm over here," said the scorpion.

Ned squatted down in the middle of the street beside the scorpion.

"I'll stay here with you," Ingrid said.

"I'm not anybody's whore," Ned said as he lay down in the street and extended his arm toward the scorpion. It moved toward him, its feelers touching the ground, sensing and feeling movement that was miles away. It would crawl a few inches, curl up and wiggle its pincers, clean them with its lobster legs.

"While you're sleeping," Ingrid said, "I'll dress the city up for you. Watch. There's another factory.

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Ball bearings. Very useful in industrial society. And a university complete with graduating students."

"Hurry up and bite my fingers," Ned said to the scorpion. It winked at him and composed a tune:

Back and side, go bare, go bare
Both hand and foot go cold
But belly, God sent you good ale enough
Whether it be new or old!

And then it crawled into his shirt through the entrance between the first and second button.

"And later I want to do it again," Ingrid said. "In a double bed. And then on the beach. And on stones."

Ned looked around at Junction before he fell asleep: white picket fences, one small perfectly rectangular park, yards meticulously tended, distances marvelously the same, as if plotted for the blind, rows of little houses with glass windows framing flowerpots and Hummel bric-a-brac.

He yawned and looked up at the sky for a wink. The glass from the line of little houses (and skyscrapers) reflected the sun into his eyes.

And as he fell asleep, Ahasuerus was just waking up.

—JACK M. DANN

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Editorial (Continued from page 4)
when I told him about the rumor I'd heard—and scotched it. "No," he said, "I'm afraid —— ——— couldn't be that fellow Hunt." And he told me who the pseudonym in question actually belonged to. So that stopped that line of investigation cold.

Time magazine for June 11 blew the gaff at last. Under the sardonic headline, "E. Howard Hunt, Master Storyteller," *Time* identified his pseudonyms as "John Baxter," "Gordon Davis," "Robert Dietrich," and "David St. John." Under at least these names—and perhaps others—Hunt had written forty-seven books.

Well, as it happens, I *had* read several. I'd never finished the "David St. John" book I'd started on Harlan's recommendation, but I had read several of the "Robert Dietrich" books (published by Lancer Books in the early sixties)—perhaps as many as half a dozen.

THE WATERGATE SCANDAL remains the biggest part of the daily news as I write this—and although it's hard to predict items of topicality several months in advance, I will hazard a guess that Watergate—and related activities—will still be part of the news when you read this.

Like most of you, I have my own opinions on the case. I am a part of what Gallup now assures us is a majority of the voting population: I believe Richard Nixon's hands are dirty. I base my opinion on a variety of factors, ranging from the objective (Nixon has done this sort of thing before on a smaller scale—documented cases were made in 1952 and again in 1962) to the subjective (the man's public posture strikes me as massively insincere; I have never felt any trust or confidence in him). It would be easy to turn this editorial into a brief against Nixon—indeed, into a brief against nearly everything he appears to stand for. But one has only to turn to one's daily newspaper for columns and editorials on exactly that point. This is a magazine of fantasy and science fiction; my particular opinions of Richard Nixon do not deserve spotlighting here.

Instead, I would like to address myself to a somewhat more pertinant point: the morality of Watergate as reflected in our fiction.

THE JAMES BOND NOVELS first gained really popular success after John F. Kennedy publicly expressed a liking for them. By very little coincidence, this was not long before the Bay of Pigs fiasco and the somewhat more successful Cuban Missile Crisis. And, although few of us realized it then, the conflict in Vietnam was even then heating up.

I don't think this is a coincidence.

The cold war has been with us since the cessation of World War Two, and it has spawned nearly every objectionable aspect of our present-day society, beginning with the Joe McCarthy witch-hunts of the early fifties, continuing with an increasing governmental mania for "security" and secrecy, and leading in convoluted ways to both our disaster in Vietnam and to Watergate.

The cold war also spawned the spy novel, although of course the genre (closely linked with the mystery novel and the "novel of suspense") has been around at least since *Thirty-Nine Steps* and an earlier generation of readers. But the James Bond thrillers began appearing in the mid-fifties, as part of a general movement which also gave us the Matt Helm books, the early Len Deighton novels, *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold* and literally dozens

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of "Nick Carter, Killmaster" throwaways.

Each of these books—whether badly written trash or a superbly crafted work—hews to the same moral line: Expediency determines one's course of actions; the end justifies the means. At some point in most of these books the shadowy father-figure who runs the hero's spy network tells him, "Listen, this is war. We're not playing polite games, and neither are they. This is for keeps. We do what we have to do—we're in this to win." And thus is justified a pattern of decisions and events which take place entirely outside the law—any law, ours or theirs.

It's beguiling. We enjoy a myth in this country—a Superman myth. It appears over and over again in all of our fiction—from comic books to TV. In the late thirties it was admirably expressed by a pulp hero known as The Whisperer. The Whisperer was in fact a policeman who saw his efforts to destroy crime hampered by the very laws he was sworn to uphold. So he created a clandestine identity in order to go outside the law to trap criminals. No longer bound by rules of evidence (civil rights for defendants were less honored then), The Whisperer could go after the Bad Guys and, if necessary, shoot it out with them with no one to justify himself to after the fact but his own conscience. Naturally, he never hurt anyone but the Bad Guys, and his conscience was rarely troubled.

Or you can go back to the Lone Ranger, for a similar rationale. Or Superman himself. Superman tossed criminals into the air or left them suspended from church steeples in order to frighten them into confession. Then there was The Shadow, the Phantom Detective, the Black Bat (and his comicbook analogue, the vastly more successful Batman)—even that paragon of virtue, Doc Savage, who "rehabilitated" criminals without the due process of law, by lobotomizing them on a hidden upstate New York estate.

It was an easy step from this kind of simple Good Guys-Bad Guys myth to the more modern spy novels, in which the Good Guys are identified as the covert saviors of our free democratic way of life and the Bad Guys are Dirty Commies who want to subvert us and destroy The American Way.

The myth has also been transposed into science fiction. Indeed, it has been with us from early times, slightly disguised in the form of free-thinking individuals who are forced by a repressive society to step outside its laws. One can, in fact, hardly pick up an issue of *Analog* from the 1960's without finding at least one story in which the good guys (Caucasian, usually Anglo-Saxon humans) triumph over the bad guys (either a repressive human bureaucracy or aliens) via the use of some good-naturedly sly "dirty tricks." At least one mainstay of that magazine at that time built his reputation on the use of this set of devices and the myth that, with the proper moral justification behind them, men could do almost anything and get away with it.

It's a seductive notion: Let's cut through all the red tape and Get Things Done. That's the way Heroes do it. And because they are always Right, they always succeed. So why shouldn't we?

I DON'T FIND it at all surprising that nearly every detail which has come out thus far about Watergate, the President's "Plumbers Squad," his plans for the formation of his own gestopo-like secret police force, and the espionage committed against his

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political rivals, reads like a bad spy novel—like one of E. Howard Hunt's bad spy novels.

The trouble is that a lot of people in this country—including, it would appear, the President and most of those close to him and their subordinants as well—believe the myth. They really believe that the best thing we can do in combatting whatever menace is currently fashionable—from Organized Crime to the Communists to Pornography—is to throw the protections of the law out the window and to plunge directly ahead into combat. And why not? It works on TV. It works in our best-selling spy novels. People are impatient with the due process of law. They already know—they think—who the Bad Guys are. So—let's *get* them!

Well, this is none too surprising in the general populace. Most of the citizens in this country have no respect for the law whatsoever—except when it protects *them*. To Mr. Joe Average, a cop is somebody to look out for so he won't get a speeding ticket, and taxes are to cheat on. Lynch law is still an established custom in many places, and municipal politics are corrupt to the core—with most cities run by real estate interests and under-the-counter deals the accepted way of building one's modest fortune. (It makes more sense when you realize that John Mitchell was, before he became Attorney General of this country, a municipal bonds lawer, and well accustomed to what are euphemistically called "back room deals.") It isn't surprising that many newspapers have received a heavy deluge of mail from protesting citizens who support Nixon with the rationale that, "This is the sort of thing *everybody* does." They *know* this is what "everybody" must do, because *they* would do it, given the same opportunity. For many, the threat of the "Godless Communists" fully justifies a President rigging a national presidential election—first to eliminate his most potent rivals in their primary campaigns, and then to sabotage his opponant (it appears that Nixon's Committee to Reelect the President was involved in the Thomas Eagleton affair—which spelled the deathblow to McGovern's chances).

But then, a "democracy based on an informed and responsible populace" is another myth. The bulk of this country's citizens are uninformed (most either don't or can't read) and have no desire to be better informed. Their irresponsibility has led directly to every problem which now confronts us as a nation—from Watergate to polution to runaway inflation to the present "fuel crisis."

But we expect better of our leaders. *They* should be informed. *They* should be responsible. We have delegated to them our own responsibilities.

And thus it is all the more shocking when our leaders fall prey to the same destructive, unrealistic myths. John F. Kennedy was perhaps the first to buy the Superman/Lone Ranger myth. He appeared to see the world as a technicolor sound stage on which he could, with grandiose gestures, defeat the Bad Guys as easily as his hero, James Bond, had done it. Cuba served him as both good and bad examples—and although it would have been disasterous for us in the short run if the Russians had not backed down and removed their missiles from Cuba when Kennedy made his ultimatum, perhaps JFK's success at that point led to his increasing involvement of this country in Vietnam and fostered the myth of our Superman-like stance as Protector of the Free World.

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In any case, the groundwork was laid for Nixon's adventures. The climate was created. And thus Watergate: life trying to imitate (bad) art. The author of trashy spy novels (*Time* magazine: "Most of the books are predictable concoctions of espionage and sex in exotic settings") participates in a particularly blundering piece of espionage against a rival political party. The president's advisors sanction "dirty tricks"—scurilous attacks on his political rivals, burglaries conducted covertly against defendants already under government prosecution. All done in the sanctimonious belief that expediency is its own justification.

What we have here is a bad case of confusion: Our country has been run by men who considered themselves above the law, men who confused the blacks and whites of fiction with the murky greys of reality.

IT BEHOVES US not to make this mistake ourselves. Fiction can be a catharsis, a release from the tensions of coping with reality. After days or weeks or months struggling with life situations which do not lend themselves to easy solutions, it is relaxing to lean back in one's favorite easy chair, pick up a book or magazine, and read about how someone, faced with even greater problems, met them head-on and defeated or solved them. But we must never forget: the world of fiction is a paper reality, one which is often brighter-hued and more simply constructed. Fiction has things to tell us about ourselves and the world, but we must never confuse the one with the other. Fiction, after all, is simply the product of men and women like ourselves—as confused perhaps by reality as we may be, and as eager for escape into a world where things happen the way we want them to and the endings can always be happy.

OTHER TOPICS: Last issue, without fanfare, we added John D. Berry to our editorial staff. Readings of our companion magazine, AMAZING SF, will remember John as the author of *The Clubhouse* for a three-year period. John is now handling our proofing (which has slipped in recent months, with Alan Shaw's departure), and has already, ah, proved himself in that department.

And two issues ago, also without fanfare, we introduced new department headings to this magazine. Our former headings, by Mike Hinge, had served us well from their introduction in our December, 1969 issue (they were typographically modified with our December, 1971 issue, but the art remained the same), but a year ago I asked local artist Michael Nally to develop a new set for this magazine (Hinge's heads remain in AMAZING) in order to reflect the gradual changes FANTASTIC has been undergoing. This Nally has done quite well, I think, and I'm quite pleased with their appearance here. Nally has also become a regular member of our illustrating staff, his recent work including illustrations for Jack Dann's "Rags" in collaboration with Jack (July), and for Janet Fox's "A Witch in Time" (last issue) as well as his leadoff illo for "Junction" this issue. You can expect to see his work in forthcoming issues as well.

And, finally, I must make note of the fact that we have been forced, by circumstances literally beyond our control, to increase the size of type used throughout this issue. I am quite unhappy with this development, since it has forced another decrease in the amount of material we can publish, but

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our typesetter now refuses to set material in eight-point and nine-point (for features and stories, respectively) under our present typesetting contract, and we have been forced to go to nine and ten point type. The loss, as usual, will be to the non-fiction—you will continue to receive for your 60¢ the same wordage in stories. Hopefully the coming months will offer a solution to this problem—either in additional pages or a return to the smaller typeface. I'll keep you posted.

—TED WHITE

A Matter of Time (Continued from page 73)

Hayden. Lionel Hayden. It was one snow-covered December day a year after my return, and I allowed myself to dream, and fell with falling snow; what had become of the man I had divorced from his art? I shuddered. Quite naturally I had assumed he would become a writer. I thought quickly to myself. It was puzzling. I couldn't recall seeing mention of his name anywhere: in newspapers, book reviews, literary quarterlies. What in the world had become of him? The question bothered me and though I let it stand for a while I could not ignore it. Hayden. Lionel Hayden. I could not even verify the simple fact of his existence. Hayden. Lionel Hayden.

In my other life, in a kind of masochistic ritual, I had read everything on Hayden I could find. Where was he born? What day? What year? I knew it all. I checked school records. Hayden, Lionel. He had apparently registered neither for university, high school or grade school. I forced myself after some deliberation to return to the past once more.

I am now eighty-four, and they say I have not long to live. A month or two months at most. Of late I have taken to my own superficial examinations of life and death; I have pondered fate and have studied the religions of man. And I wonder what awaits me when I die.

For on the day when Hayden was to be born I went to the hospital in a small southern town, knowing the Hayden's mother had entered it only two days earlier. I went wandering through the corridors, murmuring nervously under my breath. Someone stopped me if I remember rightly, saying something, what I have no idea, and I pushed them aside without a word. I was more desperately afraid than I can say; more than once that day I had known a *frisson* of horror, some premonition . . . . Dear God, you must surely think I'm mad. But I pushed my way into a room—there were shouts behind me—and there, there I saw a child pulled from between his mother's thighs, with locked mouth and blinded eyes, a stillborn child.

—JIM ROSS

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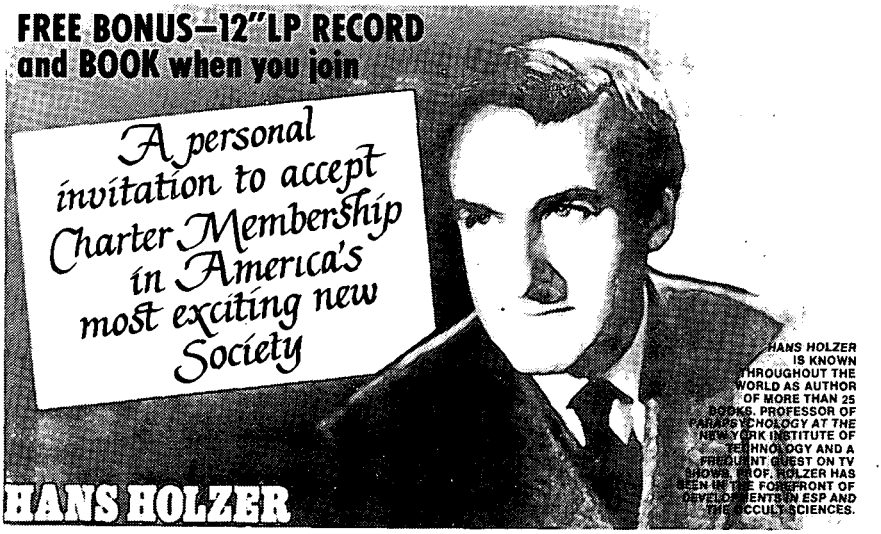

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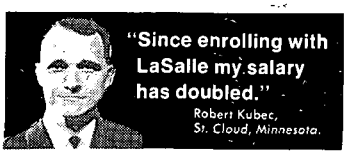

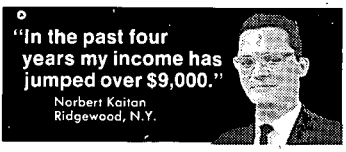

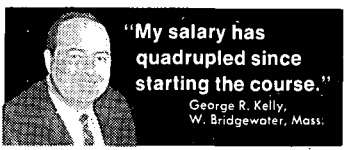

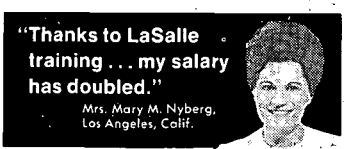

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